This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

NYPL RESEARCH LIBRARIES
3 3433 07492876 7

Wattie's Master

By

J. J. Bell

Digitized by Google

"So ye're a poet, Wullie McWattie?"
(*Page 19.*)

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

WULLIE McWATTIE'S MASTER

Digitized by Google

Something bounced forth, flashed past his eyes, and alighted on the floor. (*Page 35.*)

Digitized by Google

WULLIE McWATTIE'S MASTER

BY

J. J. BELL

AUTHOR OF "OH! CHRISTINA!" "WHITHER THOU GOEST," "WEE MACGREEGOR," ETC.

NEW YORK CHICAGO TORONTO

Fleming H. Revell Company

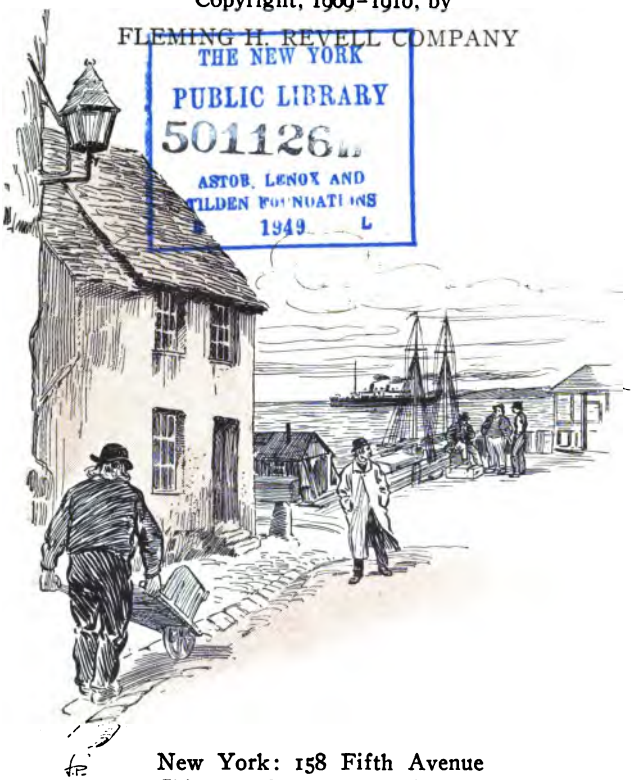
LONDON AND EDINBURGH

c 1910

Digitized by Google

Copyright, 1909–1910, by
FLEMING H. REVELL COMPANY

THE NEW YORK
PUBLIC LIBRARY
501126
ASTOR, LENOX AND
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS
1949 L



New York: 158 Fifth Avenue
Chicago: 80 Wabash Avenue
Toronto: 25 Richmond St., W.
London: 21 Paternoster Square
Edinburgh: 100 Princes Street

Digitized by Google

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	His Feelings	9
II.	His Responsibility	26
III.	His Justice	42
IV.	His Toilet	56
V.	His Luck	65
VI.	His Charity	74
VII.	His Youth	92
VIII.	His New Year Quest . . .	109
IX.	His Spectacles	118
X.	His Neighbours' Deeds of Kindness	131
XI.	His Distress	148
XII.	His Reward	157

48X813

Digitized by Google

"Come oot o' that! Come aff ma bed, afore it's ower late, ye muckle antelope!" (*Page 71.*)

Digitized by Google

ILLUSTRATIONS

"So ye're a poet, Wullie McWattie?"

Something bounced forth, flashed past his eyes, and alighted on the floor.

"Come oot o' that! Come aff ma bed, afore it's ower late, ye muckle antelope!"

Mr. Redhorn read the lines three times very carefully.

"Mistress McWattie, if ye gang to Canada, Joseph Ridhorn's a done man!"

Digitized by Google

Mr. Redhorn read the lines three times very carefully.
(*Page 111.*)

Digitized by Google

WULLIE McWATTIE'S MASTER

I

HIS FEELINGS

PAINT-POT and brush in hand, Mr. Redhorn stood behind Willie McWattie, his fourteen-year-old apprentice, and sorrowfully regarded the latter's handiwork in bright green upon the Misses Lavendar's fence.

"Wullie, Wullie," he said reproachfully, "d'ye ca' that pentin'?"

The boy stayed his brush, but made no reply.

"The poet," remarked Mr. Redhorn, "is born, no' made; an' I doot it's the same wi' the penter. Ye was maybe born wi' a siller spune in yer mooth, Wullie McWattie—I'm shair I hope ye was for yer mither's sake—but I'm feart it wasna a pent-brush."

"Was *you* born wi' a pent-brush in yer mooth, Maister Ridhorn?" asked the boy innocently.

"Feeguratively speakin'," replied Mr. Redhorn modestly, "I may say I was."

"Was't a size brush?" Willie inquired with a snigger.

"Noo, Wullie," said the painter in a warning tone, "that'll dae! Impiddence has made

Digitized by Google

some folk in this world millionaires, but it's sent ithers to the jile. What I was gaun to say to ye was this: Ye're no' a genius, but I believe ye wud mak' a fair average penter if ye persevered an' peyed attention. But yer carelessness wud gar an angel greet. 'Deed, wud it! See this!"

Mr. Redhorn pointed to a spar which the boy had just left as finished. "Noo that's no' what I ca' pentit. A hen could ha'e made as guid a job wi' its bare feet."

"Is this yin richt?" the boy inquired, indicating the next spar.

Mr. Redhorn shook his head.

"Ye dinna require a guid brush to pit pent on like that. Ye could dae it wi' a spurtle. Luk at the pent rinnin' doon in what ye micht describe as festoons. It's like treacle. Tak' yer rag an' wipe it aff. I dinna want ma reputation in Fairport ruined. Later on, ye can pent it ower again. D'ye understaun'?"

"Ay," said Willie, a little sulkily.

"Listen, ma laddie," continued Mr. Redhorn. "The golden rule in pentin', Wullie, is no' jist to dae it wi' a' yer micht: ye maun dae it wi' a' yer hert. It doesna matter what the job is. Even if it's but a pigsty or the door o' a midden, ye maun pent it as if ye loved it—no' as if ye wantit to cover it quick, but as if ye loved it. An' if ye pent in that speerit, ye'll be as happy as a king, an' ye'll whustle at yer wark frae mornin' till nicht, as a' guid

Digitized by Google

penters dae—unless they happen to be martyrs to dyspepsia an' chilblains."

"But I dinna want to be a penter, Maister Ridhorn," said the boy.

"What's that ye're sayin'?" Mr. Redhorn's ethical flight was rudely stopped just when it had got well under way.

"I'm sayin' I dinna want to be a penter. I want to be a sailor."

"Oh, criftens!" the painter exclaimed, raising his brush to Heaven. "He wants to be a sailor, an' him the only son o' his mither, an' her a weeda! Think shame o' yersel', Wullie McWattie, think shame o' yersel'!"

Willie hung his head, but muttered rebelliously.

"Hoo d'ye think yer mither wud like ye to gang awa' an' leave her?" Mr. Redhorn asked, more calmly. "Ye sud try to mind ye're the only yin she's got, an' it's yer duty to keep by her an' tak' guid care o' her."

"But ma fayther said I was to get bein' a sailor," said the boy, twirling his brush in the paint-pot.

"Yer fayther, puir man, didna coont on leavin' yer mither a weeda to work for her meat. I'm no' sayin' onything agin bein' a sailor, Wullie—though I canna agree wi' the sea masel'—internally, I mean,—but the pentin's an honourable tred, an' wi' a' its dangers, ye can aye be shair o' a funeral when yer time comes."

Digitized by Google

"I'm no feart for the sea! An' I can sclim up onything."

"Yer abeelity for sclimmin' needna be wastit in the pentin' tred, espaycially if ye get the job o' gildin' a cock on a kirk steeple," the painter returned encouragingly. "That's a job I never could tackle. Ma heid sooms when I get up to high altitudes." He smacked his lips after the word. "High altitudes," he repeated, "is no' in ma line. But this'll never dae, Wullie," he said abruptly. "The Miss Lavendars dinna pey us to indulge in conversation. Get on wi' yer pentin'. See if ye canna mak' a better job this time. Be gentle yet firm, as a young leddy I read aboot was when she tell't a young man she didna want his unwelcome attentions. Pentin's neither prize-feçhtin' nor fly-fishin'."

"It's no' sax o'clock yet, Maister Ridhorn?"

Mr. Redhorn consulted a fat silver watch. "Ay; it's jist sax. But we'll gang on till the quarter past the nicht, Wullie."

Having finished his evening meal, Mr. Redhorn helped himself to a dose of the physic which, he was always ready to testify, provided the world's one cure for dyspepsia. He then seated himself in his easy-chair by the hearth and produced from his pocket a packet of cigarettes of inferior quality. He was a novice at smoking, having started the indulgence but a year previously, shortly after his

Digitized by Google

discovery of the aforementioned remedy. One of the humours of the Fairport boys consisted in pretending to "smoke like Joseph Ridhorn." This was accomplished by taking in the smoke with an intensely anxious expression of countenance, expelling it from a mouth shaped to resemble that of an expiring codfish, and then spitting out shreds of tobacco.

Mr. Redhorn had not taken a dozen cautious puffs when a knock fell on the door of his one-room dwelling. He extinguished the cigarette carefully, laid it on the mantelpiece, and went to the door.

"Oh, it's you, Maister Danks. Fine nicht, but a wee thing cauld," he said in polite if not friendly accents. "Was ye wantin' onything?"

"I was wantin' to see *you*. If ye've nae objections, I'll come inside for a meenute," returned the local fish-merchant.

"Come ben," said Joseph, wondering what had brought the man to him. It was not long since they had parted on terms the reverse of pleasant.

"It's no' ma custom to interfere," began Mr. Danks, as he took a chair by the fire; "I'm sayin' it's no' ma custom to interfere in ither folk's business, but on this occasion I feel it's ma duty."

"Jist that," said Mr. Redhorn quietly. "What's the complaint, Maister Danks?"

"There's nae complaint as faur as I'm con-

Digitized by Google

cerned," the other replied. "I've merely come to inform ye that ye're bein' deceived. That Wullie McWattie——"

"Thenk ye," interrupted the painter. "But I think we baith agreed a while back to let that subjec' drap. I explained then to ye ma reason for takin' on Wullie instead o' yer sister's laddie, an' I've nae mair to say aboot it."

"Oh, but ye'll maybe ha'e mair to say aboot it when ye see what I've got in ma pooch," said Mr. Danks, with an unpleasant laugh.

"I ha'e neither cravin' nor curiosity to see what's in yer pooch," the painter coldly retorted. "An' if ye've come to speak ill o' Wullie, ye better save yer breath to cry yer fish wi', Maister Danks."

As it was some years since Mr. Danks had hawked his wares from door to door, and as his business was now largely wholesale, it was perhaps natural that he should resent the painter's advice.

"I speak ill o' naebody," he hotly rejoined, "an' I say naething excep' I can prove it. An' I'm tellin' ye noo that ye'll sune be wishin' ye had ta'en on ma nephew, Peter Shaw, instead of that guid-for-naething Wullie McWattie. Peter wud ha'e cost ye naething for a year, but I hear ye're peyin' Wullie five shillin's a week for wastin' yer pent."

"Wullie has the makin's o' a first-class penter, let me tell ye!" said Joseph warmly. "What I pey him is ma ain business. Ye micht

Digitized by Google

think shame o' yersel' to come here objectin' to the laddie earnin' a bit siller, when ye ken fine hoo badly left his mither was. Awa' hame, man; awa' hame an' think shame o' yersel'! Ye're as cauld-hertit as yer fish!"

"Oh, we a' ken ye're a model o' cherity to Fairport, Ridhorn," Danks returned, grinning nastily. "An' I've nae doot Mistress McWattie thinks a lot o' ye," he added, sneering. "Of course, we a' ken that ye pamper Wullie for his ain sake."

The colour rushed to Mr. Redhorn's rather sallow face. "That'll dae!" he cried. "Get oot ma hoose, or, by Jupiter, I'll pit ye oot!"

Mr. Danks retreated a step, grinned once more, and drew a piece of paper, folded small, from his vest pocket.

"This'll let ye see hoo yer apprentice admires his cheritable maister. This paper fell oot his pooch when he was sclimmin' a telegraph pole on his road hame the nicht. I was passin' at the time an' picked it up wi'oot him kennin'. I was gaun to gi'e it back to him, but when I seen what it was I thocht it concerned you mair nor him. I hope ye'll enjey it, Ridhorn," he continued venomously, laying the paper on the table and backing to the door. "An' I may as weel tell ye that if ye dinna show it to Mistress McWattie, I'll dae it, for I've made a copy. An' as for the pentin' tred, I wudna pit ma nephew to it, no' if ye offered him a pound a week."

Digitized by Google

"Are ye feenished, ye meeserable character?" cried Mr. Redhorn.

The bang of the door was sufficient answer.

"Oh, criftens!" muttered Joseph. "A body wud think the man had acute dyspepsia. Sic spite! An' what has Mistress McWattie to dae wi' it? Puir wee Wullie, an' him wantin' to be a sailor! . . . Noo what's in the paper, I wonder."

He picked it from the table and opened its numerous folds. It was a page torn from a school exercise book, and bore writing of a juvenile character.

"What's a' this?" he murmured. And he read it where he stood.

"'*Joseph Redhorn is his name,*
I am glad mine is not the same.
Joseph Redhorn aye looks cold,
His hairy head is getting bald.
He's lerning for to smoke the now,
And looks as happy as a cow.
He takes medicine for his redhorn nose
And for the chillblings on his tose.
If I was in Joe Redhorn's place,
I would use my paints to paint my face.'"

Mr. Redhorn's clenched fist fell with a crash on the table. It touched the edge of a saucer and a cup flew into the air and smashed itself on the floor. He ground the fragments underfoot.

"The wee rascal!" he groaned wrathfully. "The bad, impiddent wee rascal. Dod, if I had him here I wud sort him! An' I suppose he

Digitized by Google

had this in his pooch when I was gi'ein' him advice the day. Joseph Ridhorn! ye've been deceived! Danks was richt—the de'il tak' him! Ye've been warmin' a serpent in yer bosom, an'—an' it's bit ye!"

He kicked the remains of the cup under the table, and went over to the easy-chair.

"They say tobacca's soothin'!" he reflected, as he relit his cigarette. "But in this case I doot I'll be seeck afore I'm soothed. This is the last straw!" he continued, staring at the paper in his hand. "This is ma reward! My! but Danks wud be pleased to get this!" He wriggled in his chair. "That's the warst o' 't. It's faur frae bein' a nice poem, but I daursay I could ha'e survived it, if Danks hadna seen it—an' he's got a copy, the—the cauld-hertit gorilla! An' he'll show it to Mistress McWattie, if I dinna show her mine. What a predeecament! I suppose Danks thinks she'll ha'e a guid laugh at me. I could endure that. But she'll no' laugh, puir thing. She'll be affrontit at her son. Oh, me! I suppose I'll ha'e to show her the thing masel', an' ask her to keep it secret. An' as for Wullie,—Guid kens what I'm to dae wi' him, the rascal."

Mr. Redhorn took the cigarette from between his teeth, eyed the ragged end hopelessly, and pitched it into the fire.

"He's richt aboot ma smokin' onywey," he said to himself, smiling faintly. "It's a guid thing for him I'm no' a man o' wrath. Maybe

Digitized by Google

I'm ower meek. But I thocht Wullie had some feelin's. I never thocht he wud gang the length o' makin' a mock o' his maister—an' in poetry forbye! I'll ha'e to gi'e him the kick the morn, though I'm vexed for his mither. I'm no' prood, but I've some dignity, an' it's mair nor flesh an' blood can thole to keep an apprentice that writes poetry aboot ye. I suppose it's what the meenister wud ca' a satire. Maybe I better try anither smoke."

He lit a fresh cigarette and relapsed into gloomy reflections and forebodings.

But not for long. There was a knock at the door.

"Wha's this noo?" he muttered angrily. "Dootless it'll be Danks back to see hoo I've enjeyed the poem. But he'll no' get inside ma hoose the nicht. Bloodshed's no' in ma line."

Mr. Redhorn rose and went to the door.

"Wha's there?" he called.

"It's me," replied a youthful voice.

"Criftens! it's Wullie!" said the painter to himself. He opened the door.

"Was ye wantin' onything?" he asked shortly.

"Mither was bakin' scones, an' she tell't me to bring ye thur;" and Willie McWattie held out a parcel, warm to the hand.

"Oh!" exclaimed Mr. Redhorn, taken aback. "Ye—ye best come ben for a meenute an' rest yersel'," he said, recovering himself. "This is rale kind o' yer mither."

Digitized by Google

Willie came in.

"Ye'll tell yer mither I'm greatly obleeged to her, an' exceedin'ly gratified at bein' remembered," continued Mr. Redhorn, closing the door. "Sit doon, laddie, sit doon. Aw, ye're lukin' at the wreckage ablow the table. That's a souvenir o' an angry passion. Never heed it. Tits! what ails ye, Wullie?"

The boy's face went scarlet and then white. He turned as if to flee.

"Oh, it's the poetry," said Mr. Redhorn, lifting the paper from the easy-chair. "I sud ha'e something to say to ye."

Half-dazed, and afraid, the boy took the seat given him. His host sat down, facing him. The painter's hands trembled, but his voice was calm.

"So ye're a poet, Wullie McWattie?"

Willie shrank, but said nothing.

"Noo," said Mr. Redhorn, holding up the paper as if to enjoy every word, "I dinna profess to be a critique o' poetry, an' maybe I'm prejudiced, but it strikes me there's something wrang with this parteec'lar poem. It's maybe true, but I canna help thinkin' it's what sportin' folk ca' ablow the belt—in ither words, it's no' fair. What dae ye think yersel', Wullie?"

He paused, but Willie hung his head, speechless.

"To begin wi'," Mr. Redhorn resumed, "the name I bear is maybe no' distinguished, but I've never heard onything to mak' me ashamed

Digitized by Google

o' 't. As faur as I ken, there was never a Ridhorn hanged. I've nae objections to ye respectin' yer ain name, Wullie McWattie, but ye needna despise ithers. Then, as regairds ma personal appearance, I canna deny the truth o' yer remarks: I can but regret that ye hadna a bonnier theme for yer poem. As for ma smokin', ye maun jist try to excuse me bein' slow at the learnin'. If ever you're slow at onything, Wullie, jist remember me. Concernin' yer observations on the meddicine, I've never expectit sympathy for ma dyspepsia an' chilblains; an' I micht add, I've never gotten ony. But d'ye ken, I've whiles thocht lately that Wullie McWattie micht ha'e been an exception to the general rule? Wasna that unco stupit o' me?"

The boy had turned sideways on his chair; now his arms were resting on the back, and his face was hidden in them.

"I—I jist done it in fun. I didna mean it," he mumbled.

In silence Mr. Redhorn folded up the paper.

"I'm sorry I done it," said Willie in a choked voice. His shoulders heaved.

This was too much for the painter. He rose and went to the bowed figure, and laid a hand on the tousled head.

"I'm gaun to try to forget a' aboot it, Wullie," he said softly. "An', maybe, when ye're a sailor, ye'll mind——"

Digitized by Google

"Are ye gaun to pit me awa'? Aw, dinna dae that, Maister Ridhorn, dinna dae that!"

"But ye're no' wantin' to wark wi' me at the pentin'."

"I am, I am! I promised ma mither the nicht that I wud think nae mair o' the sea, an' I was gaun to tell ye—she said I was to tell ye—when I seen the——"

"I'm gled to hear ye're gaun to staun' by yer mither, Wullie," said the painter gravely. "Ye'll never regret daein' that."

"But I'll dae ma best at the pentin', if ye'll keep me. Please keep me, Maister Ridhorn!"

"Wull ye try to love everything ye touch wi' the brush?"

"I'll try. 'Deed, an' I'll try."

"Aweel, Wullie, we'll shake hauns on that."

While the boy got over his emotion, Mr. Redhorn foraged in his cupboard.

"Here a bottle o' soda-water," he said at last. "I used to tak' soda-water when I commenced the smokin'. It was revivin' in its effec'. But, as a drink, it doesna cheer ony mair nor it inebriates. It's no' sae bad, though, if ye pit a tate jam or jeely in it. Wait, an' I'll let ye try it."

Presently he handed his visitor a tumbler of pink and sparkling liquid. "Taste it. . . . Hoo's that?"

"It's guid!" said Willie enthusiastically.

"Weel," said Mr. Redhorn, looking gratified, "it's maybe no' up to its appearance, but it's

Digitized by Google

safe. An' noo, Wullie," he continued, seating himself once more in his easy-chair, "I want to ask ye a question. D'ye fin' it easy to write poetry? I'm no' referrin' to this poem,"—he drew the paper from his pocket and replaced it,—"that's a' in the past. But is't easy, speakin' ginerally?"

The boy recovered from a slight fit of choking. "Mphm!" he replied, at last, awkwardly.

"Ha'e ye wrote ither poems?"

Willie nodded and smiled bashfully.

"Ony aboot the folk in Fairport?"

"Plenty!" Willie's manner became a trifle jaunty.

Mr. Redhorn paused. Then he said in a casual voice, "I suppose ye never did yin aboot—a—Peter Danks, the fish-monger."

Willie shook his head.

The painter sighed.

"But I could dae yin," said Willie.

"But it wud ta' ye a lang while," Mr. Redhorn said, feeling ashamed of himself.

"Aboot five meenutes." Willie was himself again.

His host drew a long breath. "Wullie, can ye keep a secret?"

"Fine."

"Dae ye like Danks?"

"Middlin' . . . I hate him. A' the boys hate him."

"I—I'll explain the 'hale thing to ye anither time, but in the meantime I—I'll gi'e ye a shil-

Digitized by Google

lin' an' ma blessin' if ye'll write the poem referred to, wi'oot delay."

Willie gulped the last of his drink. "Can ye gi'e us a bit paper?" he said a little shyly. "I've a pincil."

Mr. Redhorn found paper, and cleared a place at the table.

"It needna be complimentary," he whispered.

"Eh?"

"I mean, ye—ye dinna need to—to praise him."

"I never praise onybody," said Willie.

"I micht ha'e kent that," said his master.

Half an hour later, Willie, his face red, his eyes very bright, handed the paper to his host.

"I'll ha'e to copy it oot fresh. Maybe ye'll no' be able to read it," he said apologetically.

"I'll manage fine," said Mr. Redhorn, shaking with excitement.

"'Peter Danks sells fish in dozens,
The fish and him are like as cousins
And when you meet him on the road
You canno tell him frae a cod.
But Peter thinks he's awful braw
When he goes corting old Miss Caw.
And all the people laugh and wonder
If she'll get catched by the Fishmonger.
When he was young he used to cry,
"Fine caller haddies! Come and buy!"
He used to bow to anybody
From his wee cart that was drawn by a cuddy.

Digitized by Google

But now so proud is Peter Danks,
If you buy a fish you get little thanks.
If I had Peter's face on me
I would jump forever into the sea.'"

Mr. Redhorn burst into almost hysterical laughter, alarming the boy who had rarely heard his master laugh in the quietest fashion.

"Wullie," he cried, when the fit had subsided, "here yer shillin', an' may the Lord mak' ma blessin' worthy o' sic a genius. Ye've saved me frae an appallin' predeecament. I'll tell ye aboot it anither day, but I maun gang oot the noo—at ony rate, as sune as I've made a copy of this sublime poem. Gi'e yer mither ma best respec's an' thanks. Haud yer tongue aboot a' that has transpired the nicht. I'll see ye at yer wark the morn's mornin'. Guid-nicht, ma laddie, guid-nicht—an' mind, ye're to love everything ye pit a brush to."

"Hoo d'ye like that, Maister Danks?" inquired Joseph, breathing hard.

"I'll let that wee scamp ken hoo I like it," snarled the furious fish-merchant.

"If ye lay a finger on Wullie, I'll ha'e a thoosand copies prentit, an' scatter them broadcast through Fairport. Mind that! Noo jist hand ower the ither poem." Mr. Redhorn spoke very sternly for so meek a man. "Ye're hoisted wi' yer ain petrol!" he added on receiving the paper so urgently desired. "An' if ye're wice, ye'll never mention poetry as lang's ye bide in Fairport."

Digitized by Google

He turned and left the discomfited fishmonger, dumb, on his doorstep.

"Criftens!" murmured the painter when he reached his easy-chair once more. "I'm thinkin' Wullie McWattie was born wi' a siller pen in his mooth. . . . An' efter a', a pen's no' sae different frae a brush! Dod, I maun ha'e anither ceegarette. . . . Brithers o' the brush! Ay, that's the expression I was tryin' to mind! Brithers o' the brush! He's a gey wee brither, but that's jist a' the mair reason for me to luk efter him, an' no' be ower severe wi' him. Ay, ay!"

Digitized by Google

II

HIS RESPONSIBILITY

"NOO, Wullie," said Mr. Redhorn, eyeing his apprentice seriously, "here the pent, here the brush, an' here the henhoose. Can I depend on ye?"

"Uh-ha," replied the boy readily.

"Weel, I hope I can. I'm sweirt to leave ye yer lane, but if I dinna get Maister Jordan's accoont made oot this efternune, an' presentit this vera nicht, I'll no' see the colour o' his money this year. I've just heard that him an' his faymily's gaun back to Glesca the morn's mornin'; an', as I ken frae experience, there's nae use sendin' accoonts efter him. It's jist wastin' guid postage stamps, for he'll let the accoont lie till he comes back next simmer. So I've got to baird the lion in his den, or the bird'll be flown. Credit, Wullie, is yin o' the curses o' ceevileezation. The mair ye gi'e, the less ye get. Whiles the sad, sad words 'to accoont rendered' gets on ma brain—like the patterns o' some o' the auld-fashioned bedroom papers that the gentry used to pit on the wa's o' the guest-chambers, so as the guests wud come doon to breakfast wi' their heids fair

Digitized by Google

bizzin', ready to eat onything. Ay, Wullie, it's a bad thing credit; but I doot the pentin', paper-hangin', and decoratin' tred'll never manage cash terms—in this warld onywey. Ye'll appreciate ma feelin's better when ye've a business o' yer ain, an' when ye've a ledger that gars ye groan at every third page. Dinna pit sae much pent on yer brush, laddie!"

The boy made haste to show that he accepted the reproof, and Mr. Redhorn continued—

"Ma ledger is a record o' joys an' sorrows, but maistly the latter. I'll let ye see it some nicht, an' gi'e ye the details o' some o' the entries. Ye wudna believe hoo faur a human bein' can streetch his credit. Cahootchy's naething to it! I'm no' gaun to mention names, but I'll tell ye an anecdote aboot a rale stylish gent that used to ha'e a villa in Fairport, an' cam' here every simmer. He was reputit to be worth thoosan's, an' dootless he was—to some folk. He wore a gless in yin o' his e'en an' spats on the baith o' his feet, an' he lukit as prood as a black horse at a big funeral. He was an awfu' yin for washin' hissel', an' he got me to pent the bath. The bath was oreeginally pentit imitation marble; an' a bonny bath it was! I pentit it masel' for the former owner. Of course, Wullie, ye ken that marble baths is nae longer fashionable; but at that time they was conseedered genteel enough, if no' exac'ly the rage. Hooever, ma stylish gentleman didna like it—in fac' he said he couldna

Digitized by Google

thole the sicht o' it; an' he ca'ed the marble pottit-meat to ma face, an' said he wud as sune ha'e Rob Roy tartan. See, Wullie! Dinna slam the pent on as if it cost naething!"

Willie became more careful.

"Ye needna scrimp it either," said his master. "Mak' as nice a job as ye can, Wullie. It's maybe only a hen-hoose, an' a puir ramshackle thing forbye"—Mr. Redhorn looked round to see that the owner, Mrs. Milne, was not within earshot—"but it's aye a job, an' ony job's worth daein' weel. If it's only a hen-hoose ye're pentin' the day, it'll be a mansion-hoose some day—ye can aye think o' that! But I was tellin' ye aboot the bath. . . . Aweel, I jist swallowed the insultin' remarks aboot the pottit-meat, etceetera—as ye've got to swallow mony remarks in the pentin' tred—an' speirt what he wantit done to the bath. 'Pure white,' says he, an' tell't me he was in the habit o' takin' a bath every mornin' an' evenin'. 'Pure white it'll be,' says I, 'but it'll tak' a wheen coats o' pent an' enamel to kill the marble.' I didna say 'to staun' the usage' as I micht weel ha'e done. He tell't me to pit on as mony coats as I liket, an' efterwards to come an' touch up the bath every month, for he couldna thole the least sign o' deteriaration in ony shape or form." Here Mr. Redhorn sighed. "When ye're aulder, Wullie," he went on, "ye'll dootless discover that humanity includes a numerosity o' persons exceedin' sensitive in

Digitized by Google

regaird to everything but an—accoont rendered."

"Did he no' pey ye for pentin' his bath?" inquired the apprentice, pausing in his work.

"Conteenue yer operations," said Mr. Redhorn a trifle shortly.

Willie grinned and applied his brush to the hen-house.

"What I'm tellin' ye," said his master solemnly, "is for yer instruction—no' for ma pleesure. May it learn ye to beware o' pairties wi' single glesses an' dooble spats, ma laddie, espaycially when they're extra parteec'lar aboot their baths. . . . Aweel, that bath took three coats o' white leed an' twa o' the best enamel afore I got it white. An' then his lordship tried for to mak' a joke aboot pittin' ma pent in the oven an' bringin' it oot pastry—meanin', of course, that I was in the habit o' mixin flour wi' ma pent to gi'e it body. I tell't him, sarcastic-like, that I never used onything but tapioca, an' that dried him up like terpentine."

"Dae penters whiles pit flour in their pent?" asked Willie.

"Stric' honesty has been occasionally foun' wantin' even in penters," returned Mr. Redhorn regretfully. "But that's no' the p'int in the meantime. The p'int is that I pentit the bath as per contrac', an' the proprietor said he was satisfied, as he micht weel ha'e been. I warned him no' to use it for three days, so as to let

Digitized by Google

the enamel get hard—tak' a note o' that, Wullie——!"

"I've nae pincil."

"I sud ha'e said a mental note."

"What's that, Maister Ridhorn?"

"Criftens, laddie! I'm beginnin' to ha'e ma doots aboot ye passin' the sixth standard. Keep mind o' what I said aboot lettin' the enamel get hard. Ye'll maybe get the job o' pentin' a bath some fine day. Ye never can tell what's afore ye."

"I wud like fine to pent a bath."

"Weel, dinna let yer ambeetion for the future interfere wi' yer wark for the present. Pey attention to yer hen-hoose. . . . As I was tellin' ye, I warned the proprietor no' to use the bath for three days. But he was as wake as a man that canna resist the drink. He was a perfec' slave to his bath. An' afore twinty-fower 'oors had passed, he was at his abolutions again!"

"Did he stick?" cried Willie, deeply interested.

"Na, he didna stick. The fool isna aye rewardit accordin' to his folly. But the enamel was spiled, an' ma services was again requested. Weel, wi' the help o' patience, saun'-paper, an' mair enamel, I got the bath pit richt, an' heard naething furder for a week or twa. Then I was summoned in hot haste, as they say in the history book, to see what the proprietor's leddy had done to the bath. She

Digitized by Google

was an amature penter, Wullie; the kin' o' penter that'll gi'e ye trouble when ye come to man's estate. The amature penter is usually a female——"

"But what's an amature penter, Maister Ridhorn?"

"An amature penter, Wullie, is a genteel person that thinks ye can save money by wastin' pent. As I said, she's usually a female —which is providential, for a female hasna the strength to dae the awfu' things a male amature could execute. She usually confines hersel' to pentin' cogly stools an' wee shoogly tables an' the like, but whiles she losses her heid an' tries hoose-pentin'. But we'll no' dwell on that the noo. I'll tell ye aboot some amatures anither time."

"But what did the leddy dae to the bath?"

"Ruined it. There was a bit shelf abin the bath—the kin' o' shelf the gentry uses for keepin' their cosmetics an' auld meddicine bottles on—an' the leddy got it intil her heid that the shelf wud be ornamental as weel as usefu', if she pentit it pale pink. So she bocht a saxpenny tin o' pink enamel and a brush that cast its hairs at every stroke, an' commenced operations. Weel, to mak' a lang story short, she let the tin fa' in the bath. Then I suppose she was feart to face her man—the abolutionist—for she workit at the mess wi' terpentine till she rubbit richt through to the oreeginal marble. I never seen sic a bath—

Digitized by Google

never! I was vexed for the leddy. She wantit me to pit the bath richt afore the evenin' boat cam' in, but, of course, that wasna possible. In fac', the job took mair nor a week. Criftens! it was a dear, dear bath!"

"Did ye never get peyed, Maister Ridhorn?"

"Pey attention to yer hen-hoose, Wullie! I got peyed—in kind, as the sayin' is, though there was naethin' kind aboot it that I could see. Efter renderin' the accoont eleeven times, I had a ca' frae the abolutionist. He said he had jist been passin' an' had drappit in to speir if there wasna ony discoont to come aff the accoont. I explained that there was nae miracles nooadays. Then he said business was bad, but bein' an amature artist hissel', he proposed to pey me wi' fower picturs. He was leavin' Fairport, so he wud ha'e nae objections to me offerin' the picturs for sale efter his departure. Weel, efter makin' some enquiries, I seen it was a case o' the picturs or naething. Oh, it's a queer warld, laddie: but it wudna be sa queer if there was nae credit."

"What did ye dae wi' the picturs?"

"I managed to sell the frames to Ogilvie the grocer at Kinlochan. He refused to buy the picturs wi'oot kennin' what they representit; an' I had forgot to speir that at the artist. So the picturs is still in the hoose. But I maun awa' an' see efter Maister Jordan's accoont. Pey attention to the hen-hoose, Wullie, an' dinna frichten the hens. Mistress Milne wud be rale

Digitized by Google

angry. When ye're feenished, ye can leave the pent in the washin-hoose, an' I'll meet ye here at seeven o'clock, prompt, the morn's mornin'. Noo, can I depend on ye?"

"Ay," replied Willie, and meant it.

Mr. Redhorn was absorbed in a troublesome calculation—7 3-4 hours at 11d. per hour. The artistic temperament does not, as a rule, revel in arithmetic, and the painter had mislaid his ready reckoner. His right hand, holding the pen, was poised in the air, so that the superfluous ink overran his first and second fingers to their second joints; his left hand rubbed the point of his nose almost savagely; his legs, beneath the table, were intertwined.

More than once had Mr. Redhorn been asked why he bothered his brains over quarter-hours in his accounts; why he did not deal simply in whole numbers—so long, of course, as the whole numbers were on the right side as far as he was concerned. To which query Mr. Redhorn was wont to reply with an anecdote of a painter of his acquaintance who had built himself a fine house with the proceeds of innumerable imaginary quarter-hours of labour. The painter had then entered his fine house with great rejoicing, only to receive the parlour ceiling on his head, which had caused him to depart this life forthwith, an awful example and dread warning to the trade.

"Noo," muttered Mr. Redhorn, "what's

Digitized by Google

eleeven times three fardens? Eleeven times three is thirty-three. Divide by fower. Fowers into three—'ll no gang. Fowers into thirty-three—oh, what is it? Criftens! I wish I had Wullie here. Fowers into thirty-three gangs——"

There was a sharp knock at the door.

"Tits!" he said, rising, "I near had it! Wha's this noo?"

Opening the door he discovered his customer, Mrs. Milne, in an obviously high state of excitement. In fact, the elderly woman was pale and trembling.

Without waiting for an invitation, she pushed past him, entered the room, and banged a brown basket on the table.

"Oh, mind ma accoonts!" cried Mr. Redhorn.

"Accoonts!" shouted Mrs. Milne, whose excitement now appeared to be that of wrath. "Is't accoonts ye're sayin'? Weel, I've a bonny accoont to settle wi' you this nicht, Joseph Ridhorn!"

"Whisht, whisht, Mistress Milne, if ye please," implored the painter, closing the door and advancing to the table. "Folk'll hear ye. Ye'll create a scandal in Fairport. What can I dae for ye? Is there onything wrang?"

"Onything wrang!" screamed the woman. "Onything wrang! Onything——"

Mr. Redhorn rushed across the floor to close the window.

Digitized by Google

"For ony favour, Mistress Milne, dinna speak sae lood. Scandals is awfu' easy creatit in Fairport. What's a-do? Cawm yersel'. Explain yersel'——"

Mrs. Milne pointed a shaking finger at the brown basket. "Open it!" she commanded, in a voice choked with rage.

Mr. Redhorn laid his hand on the basket. A strange sound came from within.

"What's in the basket?" he inquired, hesitating.

"Open it!"

The painter could not disobey. He lifted the lid.

"Oh, criftens!"

He started back. Something bounced forth, flashed past his eyes, alighted on the floor, and from thence bounded on to the edge of the sink at the window. There it came to rest, emitting weird yet familiar sounds.

"It's a hen!" gasped Mr. Redhorn, his hand to his brow. "It's merely a——" And there he halted abruptly.

For it was not merely a hen. It was a hen such as the world has probably never seen,—a hen with brilliant green plumage of surpassing glossiness. Its neck alone was a dirty white.

Mrs. Milne preserved a grim silence as she watched the truth dawn on the unhappy painter.

He clutched at a straw of hope. "Hoo—hoo did it get the paint on it?" he asked.

Digitized by Google

"Wi' a brush," was the brief reply.

"Wha done it?"

"Ye ken fine wha done it!"

"Did ye—did ye catch him?"

"I wish I had!"

Mr. Redhorn seemed to have nothing to say. His thoughts were too angry and bitter for speech.

A minute passed. "Weel, what are ye gaun to dae aboot ma hen?" said Mrs. Milne harshly. "Ye're responsible for yer apprentice's damage, I suppose."

"I'm no' denyin' it, Mistress Milne," returned the painter, rousing himself. "I'm exceedin' vexed aboot the mishap, an' I tender ye ma apologies. I'll gi'e ye some terpentine to tak' the pent aff. It's no' near dry yet, an'——"

"Keep yer terpentine an' yer tender apologies," she interrupted him unkindly. "I want to ken what ye're prepared to gi'e for the hen."

"Gi'e for the hen!" exclaimed Joseph in astonishment. "But I'm no' needin' a hen. I've nae place to keep it."

"That's nane o' ma business. The hen's ruined, an' you're the responsible pairty."

Mr. Redhorn attempted to argue, but he was no match for Mrs. Milne.

"I'll gi'e ye twa shillin's," he said sulkily at last.

"Twa shillin's! Twa shillin's for the best layer I ever had! A hen that lays twa eggs

Digitized by Google

for every blank! Na, na! If ye'll no' mak it five shillin's, I'll gang to the laddie's mither, an——"

Mr. Redhorn took out his purse. He would not have Willie's mother bothered.

"What aboot the price o' pentin' yer henhoose, Mrs. Milne?" he inquired, fingering the silver.

"We'll see aboot that when the job's finished," she replied.

Joseph sighed. Willie had been shirking his work as well as misbehaving.

"There the money," he said sadly. "I'll no' detain ye." He crossed to the door, and unfastened it.

Mrs. Milne's eyes sparkled, and her face became wreathed in smiles. "Ye're an honourable man, Joseph Ridhorn," she said graciously. "I aye said ye was that! Maybe ye'll manage to get the pent aff yer hen afore it gets diseased. I hope ye will. It seems to be gettin' stiff-like," she added, with a careless glance at the fowl which was still brooding on the edge of the sink. "That'll be the pent dryin', nae doot. Well, I'll bid ye guid-nicht, an' thenk ye for yer honourable treatment." She picked up the basket, and moved to the threshold.

Mr. Redhorn closed the door behind her, and returned to the table. The ink-bottle had been upset by the basket.

He groaned, and lifted his eyes till they rested on the victim of juvenile cruelty.

Digitized by Google

"What am I to dae wi' ye, ye puir innocent monstrosity?" he asked mournfully, advancing towards the window.

The hen gave a frightened cackle, endeavoured to fly, and fell to the floor. The paint was beginning to do more than its work.

"Dinna be feart," whispered Joseph hoarsely but kindly. "I'll no' hurt ye." With an old newspaper in his hands he pursued it gently round the room several times; but though its wings were hampered its legs were nimble enough.

"Maybe it's hungry, puir beast," reflected Mr. Redhorn, halting and rubbing his long nose. He procured a piece of bread, and scattered the crumbs on the floor.

"Pease, pease!" he cried softly. "Pease, pease! Tits! That's what they say to doos! Here! Chee, chee, chee! Na! that's no' it either. Aw! I've got it noo! Here, tewky! Here breid for ye! Tewky, tewky, puir tewky, dinna be feart! Tak' yer meat, an' I'll get the terpentine ready. I sud ha'e thocht o' that first."

Mr. Redhorn disappeared into a cupboard. The hen, obedient to its ruling passion, began to pick up the crumbs. Mr. Redhorn came out with a can of turpentine and a bundle of rags, and the hen fled to the other side of the room. Mr. Redhorn laid the can and the rags on the sink-board, and retired behind the cupboard door. Presently the hen resumed feeding. A

Digitized by Google

minute later the painter fell upon it with the newspaper, and after a struggle secured it.

And just then some one tapped at the door.

With a groan of despair, he bundled the animated parcel into the cupboard.

"Mistress McWattie!" exclaimed Mr. Redhorn, in a fluttering voice.

The comely widow on the doorstep looked at him with troubled eyes. "I wantit to see ye for a meenute," she said, and glanced around her.

The painter wiped the perspiration from his face.

"Come ben," he said, with an effort.

"I wantit to see ye aboot Wullie, Maister Ridhorn," she said, shaking her head at his offer of a chair.

"Jist that," said Joseph, speaking with nervous rapidity. "Ye're wantin' to ken hoo he's gettin' on at his tred. I've aye been meanin' to gi'e ye a ca', Mistress McWattie, but I've been unco thrang lately. But I can assure ye that yer laddie's gettin' on spendid—fair magneeficent. He's rale quick at the up-tak', an' he's got rale guid taste for a young yin. Oh, I can assure——"

A frightful din arose in the cupboard.

"Oh, that—that's jist the cat, Mistress McWattie. It—it's gettin' punished for stealin',

Digitized by Google

ye ken. But we'll no' heed it the noo. Regairdin' yer son Wullie——"

"Oh, please dinna say ony mair," cried the widow. "Ye mean to be kind, but ye sudna try to deceive me. I met Mistress Milne the noo." Her voice broke.

Joseph Redhorn stood dumb, looking indescribably foolish.

"I've nae excuse for Wullie," said the woman, wiping her eyes. "Ye've aye been ower kind to him, an' he deserves to loss his place. I jist want to pey ye what ye peyed for the hen."

Mr. Redhorn pulled himself together.

"Wha said Wullie was gaun to loss his place? As for the hen, I bocht the hen for—ma ain pleasure an' gratification. I was jist aboot to apply the terpentine when ye chappit. I'll let ye see the puir beast—it's liker a bird o' paradice nor a hen, I'm thinkin'," he said, forcing a laugh.

He unlocked the cupboard door, and with frantic protests a bundle of newspaper rushed forth and careered about the room.

The widow sat down on the nearest chair and began to laugh.

Instead of applying the turpentine, which the widow judged to be "ower severe," they gave the hen a bath of linseed oil. The result was better than might have been expected. The hen continued to live—with the widow's poul-

Digitized by Google

try—and for some time laid an egg for Mr. Redhorn daily. At any rate, Willie delivered an egg to the painter every morning.

Mrs. Milne, the original owner, publicly expressed her entire willingness to have any or all of her remaining fowls painted on the same terms as before.

Digitized by Google

III

HIS JUSTICE

"I'M no' sayin' onything agin the man," protested Mr. Peter Danks. "I say I'm no' sayin' onything agin the man—but for sheer greed, an' selfishness, an' close-fistedness, Sam'el Rintoul tak's the cake."

"Ay, he's greedy," assented the local plumber, and spat casually over the pier rail.

"'Deed, he is that!" confirmed a third native, whose business consisted in doing odd jobs about the village—odd jobs separated from one another by spells of loafing.

He was staring at a wooden case which had been landed from the afternoon steamer. It bore a city wine-merchant's label and strips of paper with the scarlet words, "With great care," "This side up." He kicked it lightly with his heavy foot. "Ay, he's greedy!"

Mr. Danks's hard mouth relaxed into a sour grin, as he bent over the label to examine it for the fifth time.

"We'll sune ha'e anither example o' his greed an' selfishness," he remarked.

"I'm thinkin'," observed the fourth of the group, Joseph Redhorn, who had held his peace throughout a fairly long discussion upon

Digitized by Google

the character of Samuel Rintoul—"I'm thinkin' ye're gey severe on an auld man. Sam Rintoul hasna that muckle to gi'e awa'."

"But the man's that greedy," said the odd-job man, while the fish-merchant gave a harsh laugh and the plumber again added to the ocean.

"We're a' greedy, mair or less," Mr. Redhorn returned. "Maybe I've been blin' to the beauties o' yer respective natures," he went on; "but I maun confess that nane o' ye has ever struck me as perfec'. Maybe ye're in the habit o' daein' yer little deeds o' kindness in the dark, for nane o' ye has ever dazzled me wi' specimens o' yer generosity."

The plumber and odd-job man sniggered, but Mr. Danks glanced rather viciously at the speaker. He had got the better of Joseph on more than one occasion, but he knew he was no match for his old enemy when the latter used his tongue.

"But we'll let that pass," the painter resumed. "If auld Sam Rintoul is greedy, it's in self-defence. He kens fine what wud happen if he was free wi' the presents he whiles gets frae his auld maister, the Colonel. He's had experience."

"What d'ye mean?" cried Danks angrily.

"He's had experience," Joseph continued equably, "o' the voracity o' his fellows—o' his neebours. That's what I mean. But in case it's no' clear enough, I'll gi'e ye an example."

Digitized by Google

Mr. Danks growled and looked as though he would like to depart; but the painter held him with a glistening, if not glittering, eye. The two other men shuffled their feet, grinning sheepishly.

"On a certain occasion—no' the only occasion by ony means—Sam Rintoul received frae the Colonel a boax, sich as ye are noo regairdin' wi' shupreme interest. The boax contained bottles o' the best whisky, tinned meats o' the finest quality, an' buns an', maybe, biscuits. Sam could never afford to supply hissel' wi' luxuries; he couldna afford to buy hissel' a dram, an' never did I hear o' you chaps offerin' him a dram gratis. Never! An' never did I hear o' ye veesitin' him, the lanesome auld man—never!—under or'nar' circumstances."

"Dry up!" Mr. Danks muttered impatiently.

Mr. Redhorn continued:—

"But in extr'or'nar' circumstances, sich as the arrival o' the boax, I've heard that Sam had a conseederable number o' veesitors. Maybe they gaed to see that he didna hurt hissel' wi' luxuries. Dootless that was their objec' an' sincere desire, for they could a' afford a dram an' ither moderate enjoyments on their ain account. At ony rate, Sam Rintoul wasna permitted to hurt hissel'."

"That'll dae, Ridhorn," said the plumber. "The man gets his whisky an' buns for nae-

Digitized by Google

thing. It costs him naething to offer a few freen's a taste an' a bite."

"A few freen's tastin' an' bitin' for a few weeks costs him a' he gets frae the Colonel," the painter retorted, with perhaps a little heat in his high-pitched voice. "As I was sayin', if he's greedy noo, it's in self-defence. I dinna blame him for bein' suspeecious o' certain o' his voracious neebours."

"See here, Ridhorn," put in the odd-job man, "I've struck a man for less nor you've said."

"Was it no' for *bein'* less nor I am? Hoots, Tam! Ye needna get excitet. Confine yersel' to strikin' wark, an' dinna let yer angry passions rise." Mr. Redhorn was no hero, but he knew Tam, whom he had tided over more than one difficulty.

"It's a peety ye canna control yer tongue," observed Danks disagreeably. "I suppose ye think ye're an orator."

Joseph flushed. "Aweel," he said presently, "I admit ye've had mair experience nor me at addressin' the public, Danks, so I'll tak' yer hint an' ma ain depairture."

The plumber and odd-job man laughed, but Danks squirmed. He hated to be reminded of the humble days when he "cried his fish" from door to door.

The painter stroking his long nose, possibly to hide the satisfied smirk under it, passed down the pier, but after a few paces halted. Looking back at the trio, he said quietly—

Digitized by Google

"I see Sam Rintoul comin' alang the road wi' his barra—dootless to fetch his boax. He'll be gratified to ha'e yer j'int assistance in cairryin' it to his abode. That's what ye're a' waiting here for, I presume. Weel, weel, may ye a' get yer reward!"

And Joseph hastened away, followed by a scowl from Danks, but by fairly good-natured grins from the others. After all, most people liked the painter better than the fish-merchant.

Mr. Redhorn would have passed on with a nod, but the old man trundling the wheel-barrow hailed him, and begged him to "bide a meenute."

"I suppose they're waitin' for me on the pier, Joseph."

"Ay," answered Mr. Redhorn briefly, but not unsympathetically.

The old man sighed.

"Joseph, could ye no' help me hame wi' ma boax?"

"Me? Aw, I doot ye'll ha'e to excuse me, Sam." The painter looked uncomfortable. "Ye see, they're expectin' to gi'e ye their assistance, as it were. They—they wudna like if I was interferin'."

"But I'm askin' ye to help me. I dinna want their assistance. I—I ken what that means."

The painter looked still more uncomfortable. "Ay," he said slowly. "But ye maun be firm wi' them, Sam. Dinna pander to their unseemly voracity."

Digitized by Google

The old man sighed again.

"I tried for to be what ye ca' firm the last time the Colonel sent me a present. I never offered them a second gless. But——"

"Ye wud be faur better to choke them aff completely."

Sam shook his white head.

"It's no' that I grudge them a taste an' bite," he said pathetically, "but—but I like a taste an' bite to masel'. Besides, it's the Colonel's present. The whusky sud last for months, an' it gets feenished in twa-three weeks. What wud I dae if the Colonel was comin' to Fairport unexpectit-like, an' me no' able to offer him a dram o' his ain? He micht think I was a hard drinker, an' I never was that, Joseph."

"I ken that, Sam; everybody kens ye're extremely temperate. But as I was sayin', ye maun choke them aff."

"I canna dae it. . . . Weel, I'll no' keep ye. I'll be gled to see ye ony nicht. Ye're no' a whusky drinker; but the Colonel has sent me port wine this time—he says in his letter."

"Port wine. Then ye mauna waste it, Sam. It'll be guid for ye, espaycially in the winter. See an' preserve it frae yer voracious freen's."

Sam gripped the shafts of his barrow and made to move on, a pitiful figure, bowed with age and dejection. Somehow the sight of the painter had given him hope, but now——

"Haud on, Sam," said Mr. Redhorn sud-

Digitized by Google

denly. "Something maun be done. We maun choke them aff by fair means or foul, as the poet says. I preshume they'll be payin' ye a veesit the nicht?"

"Ay; it's likely."

"Wud ye bid them to come at eicht o'clock?"

"Eh? *Bid* them?"

"Ay—to a cake an' wine banquet, so to speak."

"Aw, Joseph, ye're jokin'."

"Na; I'm serious. . . . An' bid me to come at seeven-thirty. I've a plan—which I will unfold to ye then—a plan that'll maybe pit an end to their voracity. Can ye trust in Providence and Joseph Ridhorn?" The painter lowered his voice, which had been becoming excited. "It'll no' dae for you an' me to staun' crackin' here. Can ye trust me?"

"Oh, ay," answered the old man, after a little hesitation.

"Then let them help ye wi' yer boax the noo, an' I'll see ye at seeven-thirty. Mum's the word."

"Mum? What's that?"

"Oh, that's the worst o' readin' a lot. I meant to say, never let bug."

"I see, Joseph. But ye'll no'—— Aw, weel, I maun trust ye. I'm seeck o' wastin' the Colonel's presents."

"That's the proper speerit," said Joseph encouragingly. "Ye can tell Danks that I hadna time to help ye wi' yer boax."

Digitized by Google

So saying he turned away; and the next moment began to wish he had resisted the impulse to support old Sam Rintoul.

"Discreetion," he said to himself, "is the better pairt o' valour—espaycially when ye're no' extra valiant by nature."

His work that afternoon was done a trifle less conscientiously than usual, and his young apprentice found him extraordinarily taciturn.

"What did ye say I was to say was the name o' the wine, Joseph?"

It was almost eight o'clock, and Mr. Redhorn was nervously puffing a cigarette in front of Mr. Rintoul's kitchen fire.

"Quarto," replied Joseph. "Try an' keep mind o' the name, Sam. It's no real name for wine, but it'll impress Danks an' the ithers. They ken what port is. An' the name o' the bun is Shakespeare. I was readin' aboot Quarto Shakespeare the ither nicht, an' I thocht the names was as guid as ony. . . . Quarto an' Shakespeare—dinna forget. An' here yer peppermints—ye ken what to dae with *them*. They're exceedin'ly powerfu'—but that's necessary. We better eat twa-three the noo, so as to perfume the atmosphere an' prevent suspeecions later."

Mr. Rintoul accepted the peppermints and put one in his mouth.

"Ye're a clever man, Joseph," he remarked, with a chuckle.

Digitized by Google

"I hope I can depend on Tam," said Mr. Redhorn dubiously. He was going to say more, when the sound of footsteps was heard at the door.

Mr. Danks entered, followed by the plumber and odd-job man. They looked surprised to see the painter sitting there. Mr. Danks barely concealed his annoyance, the plumber grinned sheepishly, and the odd-job man's expression suggested concentrated hate.

"I hope ye can a' fin' sates," said old Sam hospitably. "Ridhorn took a lot o' persuadin', but I wantit him to come the nicht an' taste the wine the Colonel sent me. Ye're a' welcome."

They gathered round the fire, for it was late Autumn, and for a while sat smoking and chatting amicably enough, the fish-merchant and his two companions being satisfied that Mr. Redhorn was not there with any spying or unkindly motives.

"Ye was sayin' the Colonel sent ye wine," said Danks to the host, at the end of half an hour.

"'Deed, ay. A dizzen bottles o'—o' Quarto wine. I believe it's a splendid wine—terrible expensive, but rale guid for folk. Joseph here was tellin' me he yinst read aboot it in a paper."

All eyes were turned on the painter.

"Ay," said Joseph. "I read that it was rale nourishin' an' sustainin', wi' a taste different

Digitized by Google

frae ither wines. Maybe it's an acquired taste, but it's boun' to be guid when the Colonel sent it."

"That's true," agreed the others, and Danks and the plumber looked thirsty.

Joseph, however, directed the conversation into other channels and kept it there for fully an hour.

At the end of that time old Sam rose slowly to his feet and, like the lady in perhaps the most popular poem the world has produced, went to the cupboard. And in this case the cupboard was anything but bare. A little husky sigh went up as the opening of the door disclosed the store of good things, including twelve dusty black bottles.

Very leisurely old Sam brought out three tumblers of differing pattern, and handed them one by one to Danks and his two companions.

"I've jist the three," he explained, "so ye'll ha'e to excuse Joseph an' me takin' wur wine oot o' cups."

He took down one of the bottles.

"Here the Quarto. Has onybody a corkscrew?"

Right eagerly Mr. Danks declared he possessed the necessary instrument, and straightway produced it. He offered to use it, and the bottle was handed to him. The point of the screw pierced the red wax and entered the cork. It was a solemn moment when the cork came out with a *cloop*. Mr. Danks proudly placed

Digitized by Google

the bottle on the table, on which the host was laying a large square cake covered with silver foil.

"This is a Shakespeare bun," said the old man, prompted by the painter.

"'Deed, ye're the lucky man, Sam," said Mr. Danks, whose geniality had waxed amazingly.

"He is that," said the plumber, spitting into the grate.

"Ay, ay," said the odd-job man, in a more subdued voice than usual.

The cake was uncovered and cut, and a good-sized slab passed on the point of the knife to each guest.

Then old Sam, with an effort, said—

"Help yersel', Danks, an' pass roon' the bottle."

Mr. Danks helped himself cheerfully, and the bottle went round.

"Yer guid health, Sam," said the fish-merchant, and took an eager gulp, his example being followed by the rest of the company.

Then fell a silence in which waves of pained surprise appeared on at least three faces. Then the rich-looking cake was hurriedly crammed into the cavities for which it was destined.

"This is wonderfu' unique wine," observed Mr. Redhorn, without looking at anybody. "I—I'll gi'e ye a' a toast."

There was no immediate response. The cake seemed to be difficult to swallow.

Digitized by Google

Mr. Danks, as if in desperation, took some more wine and—shuddered.

"They ca' it Quarto," remarked old Sam, after slipping five peppermints into his mouth. "An' they ca' the cake Shakespeare."

No one, save the painter, seemed to be interested. The three companions sat with cake in one hand and glass in the other, as if smitten with palsy, save that their faces worked convulsively.

And suddenly the odd-job man got up, set his glass on the table, dropped his cake on the floor, and ran from the room. The plumber next departed, and Danks, after one more sip, groaned and also fled. Mr. Redhorn shook hands with his host and followed them.

Not many yards along the road, he came upon the fish-merchant and plumber gazing horror-stricken on the odd-job man, who rolled on the ground at their feet.

"Gi'e me an anecdote," he wailed. "I want an anecdote."

"Antidote, ye eediot!" whispered Mr. Redhorn, bending over him. "What's wrang wi' ye, Tam?" he asked aloud.

"I'm p'isoned—we're a' p'isoned wi' thon wine an' cake. Oh, me! Can ye no' get the doctor?"

Groans burst from the fish-merchant and plumber.

"Rintoul'll hang for this," said the former. "An' the nearest doctor's fower mile awa'."

Digitized by Google

"What are we to dae?"

Mr. Redhorn shook his head.

"Can ye no' rise an' walk, Tam?" he asked of the prone one.

"I'll try. But I'm done for. Ye'll a' be done for, unless ye get an anecdote—I mean to say antidote—quick. D'ye no' feel strange an' queer?" he demanded of each in turn.

They all did.

Mr. Redhorn rose upright.

"I've castor ile in the hoose. I had an aunt that used to say, 'When in doot, tak' castor ile.' I'm awa' hame for a dose, an' then I'll send post-haste for the doctor."

The odd-job man scrambled to his feet.

"Ye'll gi'e me a dose," he said feebly. "Aw, Joseph, ye'll gi'e me a dose!"

"An' me," cried the fish-merchant.

"An' me," pleaded the plumber.

"If I can spare it," was the cold reply.

With one accord they hastened to the painter's abode, a furlong distant. They crowded into his room. They sighed with relief when he produced a noble bottle full of the old-fashioned "cold drawn" sort.

Mr. Redhorn served it out in tea-cups.

"On second thochts," he remarked, when they had all finished, "I'll no' tak' ony. A wee tate quinine is nesty, but no' fatal; the same micht be said o' Turkey rhubarb. The twa are the maist prominent flavours of Quarto wine an' Shakespeare bun. An' noo, gentlemen, ye

Digitized by Google

can retire." He went to the door, an' held it open. "Dinna use bad language; dinna try assault an' battery. If ye keep quate, I'll keep quate—I'll keep this evenin's performance a secret. I'll say naething aboot the reward o' yer voracity. But if ye trouble Sam Rintoul or masel', the public o' Fairport shall be duly informed that ye got dosed wi' castor ile—dosed like weans—by Joseph Ridhorn. Pass oot! Guid-nicht to ye, an' pleasin' dreams!"

Mr. Danks passed out. Mr. Redhorn watched him go. The plumber, who had been standing by the table, followed. It was so obvious that there was nothing else for them to do.

The odd-job man lingered.

"Weel, Tam," said Mr. Redhorn pleasantly, "here yer hauf-croon. Yer performance was fair to middlin'."

"Did I no' dae the agony rale weel?"

"Agony! Oh, man, thon agony wasna worth a button. Guid-nicht to ye."

Mr. Redhorn brewed himself a cup of tea, and sat down to enjoy it.

"Richt or wrang," he murmured, "revenge is sweet, vera sweet indeed!"

As was his custom, when not in company, he began by taking a good hearty pull from the milk-jug.

"What's this?" he exclaimed.

The milk tasted queer, in fact disgusting.

Presently he discovered that the castor-oil bottle was quite empty.

Digitized by Google

IV.

HIS TOILET

MR. REDHORN divested himself of his jacket and waistcoat, and raised his hand to unbutton his collar.

"Wullie," he said, pausing in the act, "did I no' tell ye ye could gang hame?"

"Ay," said his apprentice, "but—but can I no' get stoppin' till ye've dressed yersel'?"

Mr. Redhorn frowned, remarking—"I'm no' in the habit o' performin' ma toilet in public, Wullie. I invitet ye in to partake o' a bottle o' leemonade, because the occasion was yin o' conseederable importance; but I observe ye've feenished the leemonade——"

"Let me bide, an' I'll polish yer buits an' brush yer claes, an'—an' help ye," the boy interrupted eagerly.

Mr. Redhorn glanced at the clock. "Near fower o'clock," he muttered, "an' I've to be ready at sax. Criftens! It'll tak' me a' ma time——!"

"I'll polish yer buits till ye can see yer face in them."

"I'll be gled when I see ma feet in them. They're that ticht," said the painter sadly,

Digitized by Google

"They're a' richt for a funeral, whaur a body's no expectit to be merry; but for a mairriage, wi' dancin' to follow,—Weel, Wullie, ye can bide, if ye'll promise to haud yer tongue when I'm shavin' masel'."

"I'll no' cheep," said Willie. "I wud like fine to see ye shavin' yersel'," he added.

"Oh, that's what ye're efter!" exclaimed his master. "Weel, ma laddie, I'm no' gaun to display the secrets o' ma boudoyr for your amusement, or onybody else's. Awa' hame wi' ye!"

"Aw, Maister Ridhorn!"

So piteous and reproachful did his apprentice look that the painter relented.

"Weel," he said slowly, "ye can bide in the meantime. But nae levity, Wullie, nae levity—mind that!"

On the whole, Mr. Redhorn was not ill-pleased to have the boy's company while he arrayed himself for the event which was causing much excitement in Fairport. "It's maybe better," he reflected, "to let Wullie bide. To be alane wi' ma thochts for twa 'oors micht end in ma nervous prostration. I maun try no' to brood upon ma responsibeelities. It's nae joke bein' a best man."

Willie, with a boot in one hand and a brush in the other, gaped at his master.

Mr. Redhorn, grimacing dreadfully, was scraping the under portion of his chin.

Digitized by Google

Suddenly the painter paused in his task.

"Laddie," he said solemnly, "for ony favour, dinna glower at me as if I was a waux-work. Did ye never see onybody shavin' afore?"

"Na. It's awfu' funny."

"Funny? It's a tragedy! I bocht this rauzor aff a man in Glesca. I broke ma auld yin, which wasna bad. This yin cost me three shillin's, an' the man said it wud provide a luxurious shave. Weel, it's maybe that I'm no' used to luxury. Never you seek to shave, Wullie. Grow a baird when yer time comes."

"What wey dae *you* no' grow a baird, Maister Ridhorn?"

The painter sighed. "The plainest o' human bein's ha'e their wee vanities. I yinst tried to grow a baird, but I couldna get it to come even. So, instead o' bein' contentit to be as Providence designed me, I resumed the torture which ye're at present witnessin'. Let it be a warnin'. . . . Noo, turn yer back to me, an' dinna gloat on ma sufferin's."

"Noo to perform ma abolutions," said Mr. Redhorn, more cheerfully, putting away his razor. "Under the circumstances it wasna a bad shave. Dootless, if I had been the bride-groom instead of jist the best man, I wud ha'e cut ma nose aff."

"What has the best man got to dae, Maister Ridhorn?" inquired Willie, and spat lightly on the blacking.

Digitized by Google

"What has he no' got to dae?" cried the painter, with a groan. "He's got to be a host in hissel'! A compendium o' tact an' socia'-beelity. I thocht it was a simple affair until I read aboot it in a wee paper I got frae Miss Lavendar. She had heard I was gaun to be best man to John Sorley, an' she meant kindly, nae doot, but I wish I had never seen the paper. Of course, the instructions was intendit maistly for gentry, but they pit notions intil ma heid that I wud gledly get oot. For instance, I'm feart I stert up and propose the health o' the bride's parents, wha've been deid, puir bodies, for mony a lang year. I'm feart I loss ma heid an' gi'e the meenister a fee—a thrup'n'y bit—or dae something else rideec'lous. I'm feart I affront masel' in fifty weys. . . . But I mauna brood on sic painful details, or I'll never be ready at sax prompt. Never shave, an' never be a best man, Wullie."

There was a great gushing of water at the sink, and for the next ten minutes Mr. Redhorn rubbed and scrubbed, and puffed and snorted, with the utmost enthusiasm.

"Hech! but that's caller!" he gasped from the towel. "If ye canna be handsome, ye can be clean. Tits! this towel's fu' o' holes. I near dislocatit ma nose. That's yin dis-advantage o' bein' a single man, Wullie. Nae wonder monks an' the like was said to spend a holy existence. Nae wonder they didna weer

Digitized by Google

socks. Dod! this towel's a sicht for a female suffragist!"

"I'll get ma mither to mend it for ye, if ye like," put in Willie.

Mr. Redhorn started. Then he said quietly, "This towel is yin o' ma boudoyr secrets, laddie. Dinna repeat it."

"If Julius Cæsar had wore this sark," observed the painter, tapping the extremely stiff front, "he micht ha'e lived to be hung. He certainly wudna ha'e felt the daggers o' his foes. I feel like Ivanhoe—an' he maun ha'e been sair uncomfortable when the tinsmith had feenished his job. This is what the modern steam laundry can dae for five-pence—ay! An', as per usual, the button at the back's awa' wi' 't. I daursay the laundries mak' a profit oot their customers' buttons. Ha'e ye a preen, laddie? . . . Thenk ye. Noo for the collar—anither invention o' deluded man. Man's inhumanity to man, etceetera. My! but it's stiff! . . . Whaur's ma stud? Aw, here it is. Tits! I've drappit it! Ma fingers is a' thoombs the day. Thenk ye, Wullie. This stud is manufactured o' rolled gold, an' it's mair fikey nor precious. It's got a patent heid that flees aff when ye least expec' it. It's no' the thing to weer when ye've a ticht collar an' a cough—unless ye want to pit oot somebody's e'e. Hooever, this is a new collar that I got spaycially twa sizes ower big for me, so as the

Digitized by Google

harmony o' the waddin' wudna be interrup'it. . . . It bulges at the sides, but I'll jist ha'e to try an' look as if it was the latest style."

"Tits! I near forgot to brush ma hair. What wey did ye no' ca' ma attention to the omeesion, Wullie?"

"I didna notice, Maister Ridhorn. I was brushin' ye're buits."

"Weel, weel, ye've mair to brush nor I've got," said the painter with a rueful grin, as he looked in the small mirror. "Ma hair's like yin o' thae fastin' professors: it gets thinner every day. Nevertheless, it's no' aye the hairiest heid that's the cleverest. Mind that, Wullie, if ye commence to get bald afore yer prime, as I did." Mr. Redhorn proceeded, with mathematical precision, to arrange his few long hairs across his scalp. "I yinst read in a paper that it was the duty o' everybody to mak' the maist o' their pheesical charms an' nateral attractions," he remarked; adding gloomily, "In some cases the maist is no' muckle."

"Are ye ready for yer buits noo?" asked Willie, perspiring with his exertions.

"Na; I'll keep them till the vera last. It's nae use meetin' trouble hauf-roads. 'Deed ye've made a fine job o' them. I never had me buits brushed like that afore. I'm obleeged to ye, Wullie."

Willie looked gratified.

Digitized by Google

"D'ye see ma tie onywhaur?" said the painter, peering anxiously about him. "It's a pink tie—maybe no' becomin', but I understaun' it's quite the correc' thing. The shopkeeper said it was a' the rage. Ye've got to look jaunty at a waddin', nae matter hoo ye feel. D'ye no' see the tie? I'm sure I laid it oot at dinner-time."

They searched industriously but vainly.

"This is awfu'!" muttered Mr. Redhorn, glancing at the clock. "Five-fifteen—an' me no' near ready."

"Are ye sure ye laid it oot?" the boy inquired.

"I'm sure o' naething in this warld," returned his master bitterly, rising from looking under the bed, and rubbing his head, which he had bumped rather severely.

"Ye've toosied yer hair," Willie observed, "an' ye've filed yer sark front, an'——"

"Haud yer tongue!" cried the distracted painter. "Job had his afflictions, but I never heard o' him bein' a best man. Whaur on earth is that tie?"

"I'll rin hame an' get ye ma Sunday yin," said Willie, suddenly. "I'll no' be lang. Ye can be pittin' on yer ither things till I come back."

Mr. Redhorn made a feeble attempt to stop him, but Willie bolted.

He returned at a quarter to six, and proudly

Digitized by Google

presented a comparatively new tie of a light tartan pattern.

Mr. Redhorn winced at the sight of it.

"It—it's rale braw, Wullie," he said kindly; "but it's a—a wee thing juvenile for me. Never heed, though. I'll weer it, an' be yer debtor."

He donned the gaudy ornament, and buttoned up his old-fashioned morning-coat.

"The tie luks fine," remarked Willie, with a smirk of pride. "It's a guid thing ye let me bide."

"'Deed, ay," said the painter, glancing at himself in the mirror and shrinking from the reflection.

"Are yer buits hurtin' ye?"

"So, so," replied Mr. Redhorn bravely. "Ma chief torture the noo is mental. Gi'e ma coat a brush, Wullie. Time's near up."

Willie attacked the back of the coat, but soon desisted with an exclamation.

"Here yer pink tie! It was in yer tail pooch." And he flourished it before the owner, who had turned sharply. "It's an awfu' bonny colour."

"Tits! I pit it there for safety. I'll——" He stepped towards the mirror.

"Are ye no' gaun to weer *ma* tie, Maister Ridhorn?" Plainly the boy was hurt.

Mr. Redhorn halted. He made up his mind quickly. He stuffed the pink tie into Willie's breast pocket.

Digitized by Google

"There, laddie! Fair exchange, ye ken! If ye dinna like the pink, I'll——"

"Is't for me?" gasped Willie, delighted.

"Subjec' to yer mither's approval. Noo get on wi' the brushin'—an' mind the buttons at the back—they're like masel', requirin' the attentions o' a female. Never you be a bachelor, Wullie—unless ye gi'e up the pentin' an' become a tailor."

Just as the clock pointed to six Mr. Redhorn opened his door. Then he remembered that the clock was twenty-five minutes fast.

Digitized by Google

V

HIS LUCK

AS Mr. Redhorn was nearing his home one evening, after a satisfactory day's work, he was accosted by the postman, who gleefully observed:—

"Man, Joseph, it's yersel' that's the lucky man!"

"Hoo that, Peter?" inquired the painter, looking mystified.

"What! Did naebody tell ye ye had won a prize in the Kinlochan Subscription Sale? Ye mind ye tell't me to keep a ticket for you."

Mr. Redhorn shook his head. "I wasna hame at dinner-time the day. Of course I mind aboot the ticket. But ye're jokin'!"

"No' me!" returned the postman. "It's as true as I'm here. I had the pleesure o' takin' the prize to yer hoose twa 'oors back. I got the auld wife that tidies yer place to open the door."

"I'm sure I'm obleeged to ye, Peter," said Mr. Redhorn, excitement getting the better of him. "But what am I to dae wi' a harmonium? I doot I'm ower auld to learn to——"

"Ah, but ye're no' jist as lucky as a' that.

Digitized by Google

It wasna the first prize ye got; it was the fourth."

"Aw, the fourth. . . . Weel, weel, that's guid enough for me. I had but the yin ticket. So I've gotten the cuckoo-clock. That's fine! A cuckoo-clock's a fine cheery thing——"

"Haud on, man! Ye're ower quick. The clock was the fifth prize. The fourth prize was a——"

"A lamp!" cried the painter. "I mind noo. Weel——"

"Naw, it wasna a lamp. It was a goat," said the postman, chuckling.

"A goat?" echoed Mr. Redhorn. He began to laugh, but stopped abruptly. "A goat! What'll I dae wi' a goat?" he asked slowly and heavily.

"I wonder what the goat'll dae wi' you, Joseph," said the postman, shaking with merriment.

"Is't—is't fierce?"

"No' exac'ly fierce. I suppose it does what it does in fun, but——"

"Fun! What does it dae? Here, Peter, haud on a meenute! What does it dae?" He clutched vainly at the postman, who was moving away.

"I canna bide the noo," returned the latter hurriedly. "The boat's comin' to the pier, an' I maun get the mail bags. Efter I get feenished wi' the deleevery I'll come an' see hoo ye're gettin' on. Ca' canny wi' the beast, an'

Digitized by Google

mak' it keep its distance. It micht gore ye—in fun."

"Fun!" muttered the painter once more. With lagging steps he approached his abode. A rain squall swept the village, and his neighbours were all within doors. It was very dark.

Mr. Redhorn inserted his key in the lock, but did not turn it. He listened intently. Suddenly out of the silence came a crash.

"Criftens!" exclaimed Joseph. "What was that? What's gaun on in ma hoose?"

He continued to listen for nearly five minutes, but no further sound reached his ears. A gleam of hope pierced his gloom. "Maybe it's kilt itsel'," he thought. "Puir beast," he added inwardly. "But I'm no' a true beast lover, though Providence has seen fit to afflict me afore noo wi' various beasts an' birds."

He opened the door cautiously and stepped within, closing it softly behind him. Still all was silent. He struck a match and peered about the room. A chair had been overturned, and several dishes lay on the floor in fragments. Otherwise the room was as he knew it.

Mr. Redhorn drew in his breath with an angry hiss at the sight of his broken china. The hiss ended in a sharp exclamation as the match scorched his finger and thumb.

"Are ye there, goat?" he asked in a low voice, striking a second match.

There was no response of any kind, and he went forward to the table to light the lamp.

Digitized by Google

"Goat! Whaur are ye?" he demanded.

The match flickered out before the wick was ignited, but not before the painter had caught a glimpse of a weird object on the bed in the recess. He knew it must be the goat, and yet a shudder ran through him.

Hastily he struck three matches together, and set the lamp going. The light encouraged him.

Standing by the table and fixing the animal with his eye, he said sternly—

"Come doon oot o' that, goat!"

The goat gazed at him suspiciously, and did not move. Mr. Redhorn tried persuasion. "The puir beast's maybe feart for me," he told himself. With a kindly smile, he said gently—

"Come aff ma bed, wee goatie, an' I'll gi'e ye something nice." He wondered whether goats liked cheese or strawberry jam. "Come aff ma bed, wee goatie," he repeated, holding out a friendly hand, which may have trembled.

At this gesture the goat rose threateningly on its hind legs and made as if to jump from the bed. It did not leave its refuge, however, and Mr. Redhorn was not altogether sorry.

"It's got horns like daggers," he muttered. "A bonny prize for a single man to get! This is waur nor ha'ein' a pentit hen i' the hoose. Here, goat," he said aloud. He poured a goodly portion of jam into a saucer and slid the saucer along the floor. It came to rest a yard or so from the bed.

Digitized by Google

"There ye are, goat! Dinna be feart. Come doon an' enjoy yersel'."

The Fourth Prize paid no attention to the invitation.

"Ye saucy monster!" cried the painter, excusably indignant. He stamped loudly on the floor, and the goat bounded fearsomely. He wiped his forehead and glanced at the clock. Nearly two hours must elapse ere he could depend on the postman's promised assistance. He groaned. He shrank from begging help from his neighbours—they were so easily amused.

"If I yinst got the haud o' ye," he said, addressing the creature, "I wud tie ye up. But ye could dunch a hole in me afore I could say 'Jake Robinson!' Wull ye no' come aff the bed an' eat yer jam, instead o' glowerin' at me as if I was yer executioner? See! Luk at the jam. Come awa', goat! Dinna be feart, ma wee goatie. I wudna harm a hair o' yer heid."

For nigh half an hour did the fortunate winner address his prize; but threats and pleadings were of no avail. Then a sudden inspiration seized Mr. Redhorn. From wall to wall, above his head, stretched a rope whereon he was wont to dry wet garments.

A few minutes later the rope was coiled in his hands. Mr. Redhorn's promiscuous reading had not been wholly futile. "If folk," he reflected, "can catch rhinoceruses frae the backs

Digitized by Google

o' horses, I can surely catch a goat frae a kitchen floor."

And to the best of his ability he manufactured a lasso. During the operation the goat hoofed viciously at the patchwork counterpane, a proceeding which did not soften the owner's heart.

Mr. Redhorn, with a confused picture of cowboys in his mind's eye, gathered the rope into coils and heaved it at the offender. The rope struck the wall behind the goat, who bucked frantically.

"I doot that wasna the richt wey," murmured the painter as he gathered in the rope. "It was liker a sailor on a steamboat nor a wild-beast hunter." He set his teeth and whirled the noose round his head. Somehow it wound itself round his own neck. He removed it, patiently enough, and made another attempt. The noose in its flight wiped an old medicine bottle from the mantelpiece to the hearth.

"This'll no' dae," he growled. "I'm ower reckless. . . . Here, goat! dinna claw holes in ma bed," he cried.

It would take too long to describe all Mr. Redhorn's futile throws. Suffice it to say that, at last, by making a rush to within four feet of the bed, he succeeded in getting the noose over the animal's neck. With a grunt of satisfaction he retired and drew it tight. The goat bounced wildly.

"If ye get chokit, blame yersel'!" yelled

Digitized by Google

Joseph. "Come oot o' that! Come aff ma bed, afore it's ower late, ye muckle antelope!"

The goat planted its forepaws firmly on the bed-clothes.

Mr. Redhorn set his teeth, and began to pull.

The rope parted, and the painter found himself on the floor. At the same moment, for reasons best known to itself, the goat leapt from the bed and skipped to the door, where it turned at bay.

For some time the painter lay where he fell. He believed the creature was about to attack him, but he vaguely remembered that certain wild beasts did not attack dead people. So he held his breath till he could hold it no longer. He then opened his eyes. The goat was stationary in the corner by the door.

Mr. Redhorn arose, rubbing his tingling funny-bone.

"I'm a meeserable cooard," he sighed, "but it wud tak' a gladiator no' to be feart for thur horns. What am I to dae wi' the beast?"

He decided to leave the house and remain outside till the postman came. And then he realised that the door was guarded. The window! Yes; the window was available—but what if any of the neighbours witnessed his craven exit?

Once more he approached his prize, with soft words and bland smiles. It looked more terrifying than ever. He retired backwards

Digitized by Google

and came to a halt with his heel in the saucer of jam.

A knock.

Mr. Redhorn, sitting on the bed, his legs drawn up, and the poker in his hand, replied anxiously—

"Is that you, Peter?"

"Naw; it's me—Wullie."

"Wullie McWattie?"

"Ay. Mither sent me wi' some scones for ye. Are ye shavin' yersel', that ye canna let me in?"

"Na. I—I'm no' exac'ly shavin' masel', Wullie. Did—did ye hear that I won a goat at the Kinlochan Subscription Sale?"

"A goat? That's fine! Can I get seein' it? Ha'e ye been ha'ein' fun wi' it? Goats is awfu' funny. We yinst had yin."

Mr. Redhorn collected his wits.

"I canna open the door, Wullie, in case—in case it escapes," he called, adding in a whisper, "Lord forgi'e me!"

"Can I no' get in?"

"Come roon to the winda," the painter at last replied. He left the bed and proceeded backwards to the window. Getting up on the sink-board, he threw the window open.

Presently his apprentice climbed in. Surveying the scene, he remarked—

"Yer goat's a frisky chap, Maister Ridhorn." He deposited a parcel on the table.

Digitized by Google

"Ay, it's a wee thing—frisky," returned Joseph, letting the poker fall on his foot, and reddening with shame and pain.

Willie, however, was already advancing towards the goat. It rose to meet him. The painter let out a warning cry, but the boy had the horns safe in his grasp.

"It's a nice wee goat," Willie said, clapping it.

"Wud ye like to tak' it hame?" said the painter abruptly.

When the postman arrived he found Mr. Redhorn alone. The room had been tidied up.

"Whaur's the goat?" he exclaimed.

"I gi'ed it to Wullie McWattie."

Peter could scarcely conceal his chagrin. Relying on the painter's timidity, he had reckoned on being, himself, presented with the prize.

"Was the goat wild?" he asked, with a sharp look, and a meaning grin, as he turned to go.

But Mr. Redhorn was prepared for the question.

"A wee thing—frisky," he replied. And that was all he was ever known to say about the Fourth Prize.

Digitized by Google

VI

HIS CHARITY

IN a moment of weakness, Mr. Redhorn had submitted to having his photograph taken, an astonishing thing to anyone who knew him, for unless when carried away by a business or philosophical argument, he was the most modest, nay, the shyest of men. It should be explained, however, that the weakness just mentioned was mainly of the heart, it having been induced by the woeful tale of an itinerant photographer. Mr. Redhorn swore the man to secrecy, and underwent the ordeal in the privacy of his back-yard. On receipt of the photographs, he glanced at them once, groaned, and stuffed the packet into a rarely used drawer. He then took a dose of physic which he favoured during his occasional attacks of dyspepsia, and tried hard to forget the matter.

Perhaps he might have succeeded, had not the itinerant, some months later, given Fairport a second chance, and proclaimed the painter's patronage to all and sundry. Whereupon the ill-starred Joseph was chaffed to perspiration point. The chaff was perfectly

Digitized by Google

good-natured save in the case of Mr. Danks. It was with a vicious satisfaction that one wintry afternoon he approached Mr. Redhorn, who chanced to be chatting with several neighbours at the pier-head.

"I say, Ridhorn, wha was ye makin' faces at?"

"Me, when?"

"The day ye got photographed. Eh?"

"That's enough, Danks. That joke has had its day."

"But I'm no' sae sure o' that. It's ower fine a joke to let it dee quick. Ye sud wear a mask the next time ye get photographed."

"Never mind him, Ridhorn," interposed one of the neighbours. "Neither him nor onybody else has seen yer likeness. He's jist teasin' ye."

"But ye're wrang there! I've got his likeness in the shop!" cried Danks.

"Ye've what!"

"I've got it in the shop. The man had it amang his samples. I gi'ed him ninepence for it. It's worth it!" And the fish-merchant guffawed.

Mr. Redhorn's nails bit into his palms. He opened his mouth; often in the past he had crushed his enemy with a swift if somewhat ponderous retort; but now the very power of speech seemed to have deserted him. He closed his mouth, and drew in his breath with a faint hiss.

Digitized by Google

"What are ye laughin' at, Danks?" said one of the group. "Ridhorn can get his likeness photographed if he likes. Ye've nae business to——"

"I wish ye wud let us see it, Danks," put in another, who had the misfortune to owe the fishmonger money.

"Ye're welcome to see it," returned Mr. Danks, checking his boisterous laughter. "Joseph Ridhorn's latest portrait is noo on exhibeetion—admission free! Efter the New Year, I'll maybe chairge a penny a peep. But this day week—I'll stick it in the window."

"See here," said the painter, finding words at last; "I canna prevent Danks tryin' to mak' a cod o' me, but I can praise Providence that I'll never be as like a cod as he is." (Mr. Danks's countenance did indeed bear some resemblance to that of a defunct codfish.) "If he's no' carefu', some day he'll be weighin' hissel', an' tyin' hissel' up in an auld newspaper, under the deluded impression that he's fit for human consumption."

The members of the group, with the exception of the man who owed Danks money, sniggered, and one remarked: "That's yin to him, Ridhorn!"

"Ye think ye're funny," said Danks; "but it'll be a while afore ye're as funny as yer likeness. I suppose ye'll be gettin' a gross to send oot for valenteens. Dinna forget that I've got

Digitized by Google

mines in advance. Weel,"—he turned to the others,—"is ony o' you chaps comin' up to see the Ridhorn panorama?"

Once more the painter was at a loss, and the fishmonger with another guffaw walked off, followed by his debtor and two villagers whose curiosity overpowered their regard for the unhappy Joseph.

"I call ye to witness," cried the latter to those who remained, "that if thon wee greetin', ginger-whuskered, photographic deevil sets fit in Fairport again, I'll knock the face aff him an' his infernal machine. To think o' me gettin' photographed oot o' pure cherity, an' then him sellin' ma likeness!"

"But Danks had nae business to buy it," a neighbour observed.

"True," said Mr. Redhorn, whose passions usually cooled quickly; "but Danks wasna owin' me gratitude—quite the obverse."

"Is the likeness as bad as he pretendit?"

"Na," the painter replied drearily. "It's no' as bad—it's jist a billion times mair terrible." And adding that it was two o'clock, Mr. Redhorn hurriedly departed.

He had to pass the fishmonger's shop, and the squawks of laughter proceeding thence did not comfort him.

All afternoon his apprentice, Willie, found him unusually crusty. "Is yer inside hurtin' ye the day?" the boy once asked.

"Na, it's ma ootside."

Digitized by Google

When it became too dark for work, however, Mr. Redhorn said—

"If yer mither's no' needin' ye, ye best tak' yer tea wi' me the nicht, laddie."

Mr. Redhorn, having finished his meal, although his apprentice was still punishing the bread and jam, rose, and after fumbling for some time in a drawer, produced the packet of photographs. With many misgivings and one faint hope he handed a card to the boy.

"Never heed wipin' yer fingers," he said. "There's naething to spile."

Willie regarded the picture with a grin.

"I heard ye was gettin' tooken," he said.

"Dae ye recognize it, Wullie?"

"Ay. It's kin' o' comic, but it's like ye."

"Comic, laddie! What's comic aboot it?" asked Mr. Redhorn in a voice of indignation mingled with shame. "There's twa things I've never been in fifty years: firstly, the worse o' drink; secondly, comic."

"Weel, maybe it's no' comic," said the boy, who once in a while seemed to realize that he could hurt his master's feelings. "I meant for to say it was funny."

"Funny! Me funny!" Mr. Redhorn emitted a dolorous cackle. "Ye'll be sayin' next that I'm handsome—guid-lukin', ye ken."

"I wudna say that," said Willie promptly. "But it's no' as funny as I heard it was," he

Digitized by Google

added, as he endeavoured to remove a sticky finger-mark from the surface of the photograph by the simple process of rubbing it in.

"Dinna fash yersel', Wullie," said his master wearily. "I tell't ye there was naething to spile. But—but what dae ye see that's funny aboot the caird?"

"I think it's yer nose," Willie replied, after the question had been repeated.

"Ma nose? . . . Weel, I canna help ma nose. Was it no' the great Lord Nelson that used to say: 'Gi'e me a man wi' a nose'?"

"Had a' his men lost their noses?" queried Willie, much interested. "Did they lose them wi' bullets or swords?"

"Na, na, Wullie; ye see, his lordship meant a man wi'—wi' great intelligence. It has been asserted by philosophers, philogists, an' ither learned bodies, that muckle noses indicate muckle brains. It's no' for me to preshume to question men o' that stamp; I can but humbly accep' the assertion—an' the compliment. D'ye see, laddie?"

"I see," said Willie, who wanted to get on with his bread and jam, but who was not unused to his master's dissertations. "Has an elephant got a muckle brain?" he asked suddenly.

"Stupendous," the painter replied, after a brief hesitation.

"I never seen an elephant excep' in picturbooks."

Digitized by Google

"Did ye no'? We'll ha'e to rectify that some day," said Mr. Redhorn kindly.

"I wud like fine to see an elephant. . . . I suppose ye've got an extra big brain, Maister Ridhorn?"

For a moment Joseph was taken aback. Then with modest gratification he said: "Weel, laddie, it's no' jist for me to say. What pit that into yer heid? Eh?" He laughed and laid a kindly hand on his apprentice's shoulder.

"I heard a chap sayin'," returned Willie thoughtlessly, "that Maister Danks had said ye wud pass for an elephant if yer nose was twa-three inches longer."

Mr. Redhorn's hand left the young shoulder and gripped the back of the boy's chair.

"Ay!" he said at last; "ay! Jist so! 'Mphm! I perceive his meanin'; likewise the humour o' the seetuation! Ay!"

"What's ado?" asked Willie anxiously.

"Naething, laddie," replied Mr. Redhorn, pulling himself together. "A mere fleetin' spasm."

"What's that?"

"May ye never ken." Mr. Redhorn endeavoured to proceed in a natural tone of voice, and began an octave too low. After a bit of coughing he said: "An' so ye think ma likeness is funny, Wullie—espaycially the —the trunk?"

Digitized by Google

"I dinna see ony trunk. Are ye sittin' on it? I see a thing like a boax——"

"I meant ma nose."

Willie laughed loudly. "The elephant's——"

"Ye're welcome," said the painter. "When ye're feenished, I'll be gratified to hear what ye conseeder funny aboot ma nose."

But Willie had suddenly become uncomfortable.

"I dinna see onything funny aboot yer nose, Maister Ridhorn," he said stolidly.

"D'ye see onything—peculiar? Come on, laddie; I want the truth. I—I demand it."

"It—it luks as if it was oot o' jint," said the boy at last; "it luks as if it had been —streetched."

"Proceed!"

"It—it luks ridder nor it is, sir."

"Conteenue!"

But Willie rebelled. "Am I no' to feenish ma tea?" he inquired, laying down the photograph.

Whatever he might be, Mr. Redhorn was humane. He returned to earth, with a bump.

"'Deed, ay, Wullie; ye're to feenish yer tea. Help yersel'. Eat a' ye can. Enjey yersel' when ye're young. Tak' mair jam—tak' plenty. . . . I like ye, laddie. Ye've nae sentiment, an' ye're no' a flatterer. As I said afore, I perceive the humour o' the seetuation. I see what Danks an' his companions are laughin' at. Let them laugh! I'm laughin' masel'."

Digitized by Google

Here Mr. Redhorn made curious noises which all but caused Willie to choke. "I say I'm laughin' masel', but *at* them, no' wi' them. I'm laughin' wi' peety at their eegnorance, at their want o' common, scienteefic, photographic knowledge. They're laughin' at ma likeness because they think ma nose is oot o'—oot o' proportion; whereas, as ony summer-veesitor, or tourist, or amature photographer wud inform them, ma nose is merely oot o' focus—oot o' focus, neither mair nor less!"

Mr. Redhorn concluded his remarks, which were spoken with great rapidity, with a frightful cackle; then snatching up the photograph and dashing round the table, he thrust it along with the other eleven prints into the fire.

Having stirred them till they blazed, he addressed them with these words: "Him that laughs best, laughs last!" He then made to draw himself erect, with the intention, no doubt, of delivering a further oration before his astonished apprentice, but his head encountered the mantelpiece which, fortunately, was of wood.

"Criftens!" he ejaculated.

"Are ye hurtit?" inquired Willie. "Is't yer crust?"

"Ye best speir at the mantelpiece," returned the painter ruefully, rubbing the bruise. "What was I sayin', laddie, afore I dunted ma heid?" he asked presently.

Digitized by Google

"Ye was sayin' a heap o' things. Ye said——"

"Forget them, laddie! I was cairried awa'. Ma indignation got the better o' me, but I sud ha'e corkit it up." Mr. Redhorn wiped his eyes, and continued: "Efter a', an' when a's said an' done, there's naething like a bit pheesical pain for causin' ye to neglec' mental agony. Is there a lump on ma heid?"

"It's wee yet," answered Willie, "but it'll maybe rise."

"That's possible." Mr. Redhorn came to the table, and applied a little butter to the bruise. "It's guid for the hair onywey," he remarked philosophically. "See an' tak' plenty jam, Wullie."

"The pot's emp'y."

"Is't? 'Deed, ye're a whale for jam! Wait till I get anither pot. . . . An' ye needna mention the photographs to onybody. Wull ye mind that?"

"Ay," said the boy. "Wull I no' say onything aboot yer nose bein' oot o' focus—what's a focus?"

"Say naething whatever. Dumb folk never get into trouble, excep' when they're deef forbye, an' then they can aye blame the motors."

"But what's——"

"Pey attention to yer eatin'," said Mr. Redhorn a trifle sharply. "Regaird ma previous remarks as merely humorous, as the young man said to the young leddy efter declarin' his

Digitized by Google

passion. But if ye ever happen to see a wee man wi' ginger whuskers an' a photographic stock-in-trade snokin' aboot Fairport, inform m wi'oot fractional delay."

"Ay," said Willie, finding the new jam much to his taste. "Are ye for gettin' tooken again?"

"Maybe as a murderer, Wullie, maybe as a murderer," muttered the painter, as he lit a cigarette.

"Gor!" remarked the apprentice, who was used to extraordinary observations, which he did not always understand, from his host, "it's you for the comic!"

After which Mr. Redhorn relapsed into a gloomy silence that lasted until Willie announced his sense of repletion and the necessity for his departure.

To a man of Joseph Redhorn's sensitive nature, the situation was fraught with misery. Ordinary chaff he could endure, but to have his likeness, or rather caricature, as he regarded it, exposed in the fishmonger's window was too much to be borne. Knowing his enemy's spitefulness of old, he could not doubt that Danks would carry his threat into effect, and he racked his brains in vain for ways and means of escape from the approaching humiliation. Worst of all he had visions of Willie's widowed mother, for whom he had now a more than friendly regard, joining the sniggering

Digitized by Google

throng on Christmas day. It was all he could do to attend to his business, and his nights were spent in impatient writhings and frantic concocting of plans, which fell to pieces in the light of the day.

On the day before the fulfilment of the fishmonger's threat, he was near his wits' end. The weather being wet and stormy, and business non-existent, he was occupying his hands, but not his mind, in tidying up his paint store. His weary brain was still weaving flimsy, foolish schemes for the checkmating of the fishmonger.

"It's nae use," he said at last, for the hundredth time.

Just then Willie, who had been sent to fetch a parcel from the midday steamer, appeared. He had evidently been running.

"Whaur's the paircel, laddie? Did it no' come wi' the boat?" Mr. Redhorn demanded.

"Ay, but I cam' to tell ye that Ginger Whuskers is comin'."

"What's that?"

"Ginger Whuskers—the photograph man—d'ye no' mind ye tell't me——"

"Is he comin' here?"

"Ay. I heard him speirin' for ye. But he hadna got his machine."

Mr. Redhorn drew a mighty breath. Then he said: "Ye can gang hame to yer dinner noo, Wullie."

"But it's ower early."

Digitized by Google

"Gang hame when I tell ye."

"But the paircel——"

"Gang!"

Willie sulkily withdrew round the corner of the shed.

"Better wantin' witnesses," muttered Mr. Redhorn, and shut the door softly. He then took off his coat, rolled up his sleeves, and doubled his fists. "I never yet struck man nor beast," he reflected, "but——"

A timid tap fell on the door.

"Come ben!" commanded the painter hoarsely.

The door opened slowly. The bitter blast that entered was accompanied by the dripping figure of a man of mean stature and deplorable physique.

Mr. Redhorn was seized with a violent attack of sneezing.

"Cold day," said the visitor, closing the door. "I called——"

"What d'ye want?" Mr. Redhorn demanded from behind a large red handkerchief, with considerably less ferocity than might have been expected.

"I called," repeated the visitor mildly, "to see how you were pleased with your photographs."

"What! Ha'e ye actually got the neck to—to——" Another sneeze cut the sentence short.

The dripping figure held up a bluish hand. "Mr. Redhorn, allow me to say that I took

Digitized by Google

special pains with your photograph, on account of your great kindness to me. Honestly I did all I could to make the result gratifying to you. I assure you——"

Mr. Redhorn put away his handkerchief, but forgot to double his fists.

"Dae ye want to get kilt?" he exclaimed.

"I beg your pardon?"

"Kilt—slain—slaughtered—murdered! I'm askin' ye!"

The other drew back. "I don't understand," he said, looking more puzzled than alarmed. "I called, hoping that the photos had pleased you, and hoping also that you would see your way to give me your kind order for another dozen, on the same terms as last—cash with order. Things," added the little man with a large sigh, "are terrible bad with me at present."

It took Mr. Redhorn nearly a minute to recover from the stupefaction induced by the visitor's calm, melancholy speech.

"That's enough," he said sternly. "I'm no' as saft as some folks maybe think me. Ye've got a' ye'll ever get frae Joseph Ridhorn, excep' a sample o' corporeal punishment, which I've decidet to owe ye in the meantime. Noo, get oot o' this as quick as ye can, for yer presence to me is onything but tasteful." Mr. Redhorn waved his hand towards the door, and inadvertently kicked over a pot of green paint. "See what ye've made me dae," he went on ir-

Digitized by Google

ritably. "Could ye no' ha'e been content wi' pittin' ma nose oot o' focus, forbye——"

"Mr. Redhorn," said the little man, with an involuntary shiver, "I appreciate your jokes, but I'm sorry I can't make any myself to-day. You were kind to me once; I hope you will be the same again by giving me a repeat order. I would gladly offer you a new sitting, but—well, I'm ashamed to say that my camera is at present in—in pawn. As I said already, things are very bad with me at present. I—I do not know where to turn. I have a wife and three children, Mr. Redhorn——"

The painter, engaged in mopping up the mess of paint, did not raise his head. "That's a peetifu' state o' affairs, but I doot I canna dae onything for ye," he said. "In fac' I'm no' disposed to forgi'e ye. What business had ye," he demanded abruptly, "to sell that caird o' mines to Danks, the fishmonger?"

The dripping figure seemed to waver.

"I'm sorry if that offended you, Mr. Redhorn," it said feebly, at last. "But Mr. Danks declared he was a particular friend of yours——"

"Oh, the lee!"

"—and I was tempted. . . . The truth is, I was very hungry that day. I had missed breakfast, and——"

"Ye was what?" The painter looked up sharply.

Digitized by Google

The wretched little man bowed his head.

Mr. Redhorn rose.

"Are ye hungry the noo?"

There was no answer.

"Tell me, man!—criftens! Ye're fair drookit!—ha'e ye had yer breakfast the day?"

"N—not yet."

"Joseph Ridhorn," the painter muttered, "never daur to ca' yersel' a Christian again." Seizing the photographer by the arm, he flung open the door. "Come awa', man! Ma hoose is near by."

Willie, the eavesdropper, went home to his dinner grievously disappointed. He had expected something much more exciting.

The afternoon steamer bore away the photographer, no longer dripping and starving, but warmed and filled; no longer despairing, but hoping. Before leaving Fairport, he had tried to recover the photo from Danks, who had flatly refused to part with it. Mr. Redhorn did not go to see him off, being threatened with a cold in the head, which malady in his case was invariably severe. He sat by the fire, trying old-fashioned remedies, while depression claimed him for its own. The miseries of others do not always prove antidotes to one's own. The mind's eye of Joseph Redhorn was exclusively occupied by a vision of the fishmonger's window and his likeness in the midst thereof. . . .

Digitized by Google

At five o'clock Willie appeared.

"What d'ye want, laddie?" inquired the painter impatiently.

"Ye said I was to come for ma tea the nicht."

"Mercy! So I did——!"

"—an' Danks said I was to gi'e ye this."

"What's this?" Mr. Redhorn tore off the soiled newspaper and disclosed his own features—according, as he afterwards said, to the camera. "Weel, I never!" he shouted joyfully. "I didna think it o' Danks. Did he say naething, Wullie? Nae message?"

"He said ye was to luk at the back."

Mr. Redhorn turned the card, and read in large writing—

"Hopping you will have a merrier X-mas than you look.—P. DANKS."

Mr. Redhorn laughed, sneezed, and laughed again.

"Wullie," he cried almost gaily, "set the table, an' I'll bring ye back something nice."

Grabbing his cap, he fled from the house, and to the shop of Peter Danks.

"Danks," he said warmly, "ye're a better man than I thocht."

"Ye're nae worse, Ridhorn," returned Mr. Danks coolly. "I doot ye've seen the last o' yer twa pounds an' yer overcoat," he added.

Mr. Redhorn blushed. "He didna need to ha'e tell't ye that."

Digitized by Google

"Weel, I'm thinkin' ye've lost them onywey."

"We'll see," said the painter cheerfully. "Time alane can tell, as the poet says." After some hesitation he held out his hand.

"As ye please," replied the fishmonger. "But mind, I'm no' feenished wi' ye yet, Ridhorn."

"I'll risk that," Mr. Redhorn returned, and shook hands again.

People with abnormally developed business instincts may desire information as to whether the itinerant photographer ever returned the loan. Well, no; he has not yet done so—in mere filthy lucre, at least; but about a couple of years after the transaction, Mr. Redhorn received a nicely mounted enlargement of his likeness, some 3ft. by 2ft. in extent, along with compliments and also some more or less interesting details concerning the costs of frames suitable for the aforesaid enlargement.

Digitized by Google

VII

HIS YOUTH

MR. REDHORN looked up from his work—a large four-oared boat in process of being painted white.

"Wullie," he said a trifle sternly, "pey attention to yer job, an' dinna heed the sea-gulls."

"I wasna lukin' at the sea-gulls," the apprentice retorted.

"I thocht ye was. What was ye lukin' at, then?"

"Naething."

"Aweel," said Mr. Redhorn after a short pause, "ye better luk at the boat-hoose, because it's got to be feenished the nicht. I promised Maister Matheson I wud complete the job, certain, sure, at sax p. m.—an' it's got to be done! The word o' a Ridhorn has never been broke—excep', maybe, under unique circumstances. The pentin' tred has, dootless, a bad name for procrastination——"

"What's that, Maister Ridhorn?"

"Hunkerslidin', or—or footerin'. But I can truthfully say I never practised it intentional. Apply yersel' to yer task, laddie, an' ye'll be

Digitized by Google

happy. Dae yer best, an' ye'll never be confoundit, nor ashamed to receive peyment o' yer accoonts when due—or itherwise."

"Are folks whiles ashamed to get peyment o' their accoonts?" the apprentice inquired, with a view to prolonging the conversation.

"Some folk'll be sair ashamed later on," said Mr. Redhorn solemnly. "Some folk'll no' be extra pleased to meet their customers in the next warld, I'm thinkin'! Strive to gi'e yer customers—when ye get them—the best value possible, an' then ye'll avoid disagreeable reunions ayont the tomb. Noo proceed wi' yer occupation."

Mr. Redhorn dipped his brush, preparatory to resuming operations.

"This is an awfu' ugly colour," remarked Willie, eyeing his own paint-pot with great disfavour.

"Ugly!" exclaimed his master, wheeling round, brush poised in the air. "What's ugly aboot it?"

"I dinna like dark broon," said the boy. "If this was ma boat-hoose, I wud pent it a bonnier colour."

Mr. Redhorn smiled leniently.

"That's because ye're young, Wullie. In the days o' ma youth, I daursay I wud ha'e conseedered dark broon ugly enough, an' I wud ha'e been for pentin' the boat-hoose saumon-pink, or sky-bew, or maybe pea-green. Youth prefers the fancy colours to the suitable sort.

Digitized by Google

Later on ye'll ken better what's appropriate an' what's unappropriate. But, as a rule, ye'll ha'e to lay on the colour yer customer chooses. I'm no' sayin' ye sud never advise a customer agin makin' a spectacular monstrosity o' his property. In ma time, I can modestly say I've saved mony a pairty frae his or her atrocious notions. But it's got to be done wi' the utmaist discreetion, laddie, the utmaist discreetion. There's occasions when it's best to agree—espaycially when it's a big job—an' jist dae whatever the customer requests ye to dae, though ye're weel aware that ye're creatin' an eyesore that'll haunt ye for years. In the meantime, pey attention to yer present duty."

"But, Maister Ridhorn, is it a' the same to you whether ye're pentin' wi' bonny colours or pentin' wi' ugly yins?"

"There's nae ugly colours, laddie. In the days o' ma youth, I maybe thocht there was, but ye get wicer as ye get aulder. Noo——"

"But wud ye be jist as pleased to be pentin' the hoose dark broon as the boat white?"

"Jist as pleased, Wullie, jist as pleased. For ye see——"

"Then I wish ye wud swop pents, an' let me ha'e a shot at the boat."

Mr. Redhorn shook his head, saying—

"Ah, but ye're no' ready for marine pentin'; ye ha'ena suffeecient experience. Ye maun be content wi' plain jobs for a while, yet."

Digitized by Google

"Did ye never get pentin' a boat when ye was young—in the days o' yer youth?"

"I did—an' a queer mess I made! It tak's a heap o' practice to mak' a nice job o' a boat. But noo we maun draw wur conversation to a close, as the novelles say. We'll need to tak' ten meenutes less nor usual to wur dinner the day. Nae man can say that Joseph Ridhorn chairged him for wastit time."

"But, Maister Ridhorn——"

"Haud yer tongue, an' dae yer duty," said the master-painter, with a touch of asperity.

For half an hour or so they wrought in silence. At last, however, Willie had to give vent to the idea which had been unsettling his mind all morning.

"There a menagerie at Ardmartin the day," he remarked, in an extremely careless tone of voice.

"A what?" said Mr. Redhorn, without stopping work.

"A menagerie—wild beasts, ye ken," said Willie, not quite so carelessly as before.

The interest evinced by Mr. Redhorn was disappointingly small.

"Aw," he muttered.

"It's to be at Ardmartin jist for the day," the boy observed, after a short pause. "It's gaun awa' the morn."

"Is it?"

"I wish it had been stoppin' till Seturday."

"'Deed ay," said Mr. Redhorn equably.

Digitized by Google

"Some o' the Fairport chaps are gaun to see this oftermune," the boy pursued, with a healthy glance at his master, who was now quite immersed in his work. "Bob M'Fee is drivin' them a' in his cairt. He sterts at twa o'clock."

Mr. Redhorn offered no remark upon this piece of information.

Willie sighed, and made a few unenthusiastic strokes with his brush. Then—

"Bob M'Fee askit me to gang in his cairt, Maister Redhorn."

"Did he? . . . This boat's vera licht for its size. Maister Matheson wud pey a guid penny for it when it was new. . . . Hoo are ye gettin' on there, laddie?" The painter put the inquiry without raising his eyes.

"Weel enough," replied Willie, in a rather sulky voice.

A silence followed, during which he did some extremely poor painting, and then he spoke again.

"Maister Redhorn, did ye ever see a menagerie?"

"Oh, ay, I've seen a menagerie—sundry menageries, to be exac'."

"Did ye like them?"

"Fine! Menageries is exceedin'ly instructive."

"I've never seen a menagerie."

"Hah, ye no'? But ye're young yet—ye're young yet."

Digitized by Google

"Did ye no' get seein' ony menageries when ye was young—in the days o' yer youth?"

"Oh, ay; I seen them when I was young. I may say I was a great lover o' menageries in the days o' ma youth, Wullie. In fac', I was ower fond o' them. I mind plunkin' the schule to gang to a menagerie, an' anither time I ran awa' frae ma wark—I was servin' ma apprenticeship then—to see a circus. Ma maister was unco angry at me."

Willie let his brush sink deep in the pot, and asked eagerly—

"Did he gi'e ye the kick?"

"Na; but I deserved it."

"I suppose he was a kind man, Maister Ridhorn?"

"He was that. But I was a bad laddie."

"Ye wasna that bad, Maister Ridhorn."

The painter smiled.

"Weel," he said modestly, "I presume I was jist like ither laddies. Youth maun ha'e its fling, as the poet says."

Mr. Redhorn relapsed into busy silence, and until dinner time—one o'clock—his assistant also painted industriously.

"Mind an' be back here at ten meenutes afore twa," said the former as they parted.

Joseph Redhorn's temper was usually of the mildest, but it so happened that he was suffering on this particular day from an attack of dyspepsia, induced, in all probability, by a

Digitized by Google

somewhat incautious consumption of pancakes the previous evening. The pancakes, by the way, had been a present from the comely widow, Willie's mother. Dyspepsia was an old enemy of Joseph's, but for a considerable time he had baffled it, as he was fond of declaring, with the aid of a certain patent medicine. Therefore, its return depressed as well as pained him, and, though not of a romantic disposition, he could not help wishing that the cause of his discomfort had come from other hands.

As he resumed work in the hot October sunshine, at a quarter to two, he regretted his faithful promise to his customer, Mr. Matheson. His eyes ached and his temples throbbed. But his undistinguished visage wore a look of grim determination, and for half an hour he wrought steadily and conscientiously, telling himself that Willie's delay in returning was doubtless due to the lad's mother, who had no one else to help her with odd jobs. He also assured himself that Willie, once *he* heard of the dyspepsia, would do his level best to make up for lost time. Mr. Redhorn had frequently found his apprentice idle and careless, but never unsympathetic.

Yet when three o'clock came—with no sign of Willie—the painter could not have denied that he was extremely annoyed. Standing upright and pushing back his cap, he clutched his aching brow and gazed down the yellow road that ran along the shore in the direction of the

Digitized by Google

boy's home. The road was empty. Willie had not even left the cottage. Mr. Redhorn emitted a groan of dissatisfaction, and once more applied himself to his task.

He was soon disturbed, however, and by his other old enemy, Mr. Peter Danks.

He came along the shore towards the painter as one who is rather pleased to be the bearer of unpleasant tidings. Some people are like that.

"Ye're busy, Ridhorn," he remarked, halting a couple of yards from the boat, and surveying Joseph with a patronizing grin.

"Ay, I'm busy," said the painter, curtly.

"But no' ower busy to gi'e yer apprentice a hauf-holiday."

"Eh?" Mr. Redhorn started and looked up, then resumed his painting in a hurry.

"I'm sayin' ye're no' ower busy to gi'e yer apprentice a hauf-holiday," pursued Mr. Danks. "I seen him along the road there, gettin' into M'Fee's cairt, boun' for Ardmartin."

"Oh!" said Mr. Redhorn, "d-d-did ye?"

"Ay, as clear as I see that boat ye're pentin'. I'm thinkin', Ridhorn, ye'll kill that laddie wi' kindness. I maun say I was surprised to see him aff on the ran-dan when his maister was sae busy."

"Aw!" muttered Mr. Redhorn, conscious that the other's small, sharp eyes were keenly watching him.

"Of course, I'm presumin' the laddie got

Digitized by Google

leave to gang to Ardmartin. I thocht o' speirin' at his mither when I was passin' the cottage, but——"

Joseph pulled himself together. Not for worlds would he have Danks know the true state of affairs. He knew that Danks still resented his having made Willie his apprentice; he was aware that Danks had once been snubbed by Willie's mother; and he was used to Danks's innuendoes against the boy's character.

"There's naething extr'or'nar' in Wullie gaun to see the menagerie at Ardmartin—is there?" he asked, not quite steadily, meeting the small sharp eyes, which were immediately shifted.

"Menagerie!" Mr. Danks burst into a high cackling laugh. "Menagerie, did ye say?"

"Ay, I said menagerie—if ye ken what that is." said Mr. Redhorn; adding sarcastically, "I suppose an aquarium's mair in your line!"

But Mr. Danks continued to cackle for nearly a minute.

"My! that's a guid yin!" he exclaimed at last. "They've made a mistake aboot the day. The menagerie was at Ardmartin *yesterday*. Guid kens whaur it is noo! M'Fee an' the rest o' them'll be wild—they'll ha'e a menagerie o' their ain. It wud serve yer apprentice richt, supposin' he had ta'en French leave the day an' left ye wi' mair wark nor ye can feenish by yersel'! Eh, Ridhorn?"

Digitized by Google

Joseph recoiled.

"Wh-wha was tellin' ye I had mair wark nor I could feenish?" he demanded.

"Oh, it's jist a bit joke that's gaun aboot Fairport the day. Maister Matheson, on the pier this mornin', said to a freen' that he wud eat his hat if Ridhorn the penter had the boat an' boat-hoose feenished the nicht. He said a' penters was alike at makin' fair promises."

At these words Joseph became scarlet with indignation.

"So ye see," said Danks, grinning, "that was why I was surprised at ye lettin' yer assistant aff the day. For ye canna feenish the job yersel'."

"Ay, but I can!" spluttered Joseph.

"Na, ye canna! It'll be dark afore seeven the nicht. Onybody wi' hauf an e'e could see that ye canna feenish it. If ye dae feenish it, the pentin' 'll be improperly executed. I'll tak' on a bet, if ye like, Ridhorn."

"Oh, get awa' frae me!" cried the unhappy painter.

"What wey did ye no' keep the laddie at his wark?" Mr. Danks inquired, coolly proceeding to light his pipe. "It's a peety to disapp'int a' the folk that was waiting to see Maister Matheson eatin' his hat this evenin'. But I suppose ye're used to apologizin' for unavoidable delays——"

"That's enough, Danks!" shouted Joseph, now thoroughly roused. "Ye've had to apolo-

Digitized by Google

gize for yer fish afore noo. Mind yer ain business, and I'll mind mines! Get oot ma sicht!"

Mr. Danks retired a couple of paces, took a pull or two at his pipe, spat, and put the question direct—

"Did ye gi'e the laddie leave to gang to Ardmartin?"

"It's nane o' your business, man!"

"It's a ceevil question."

"I've nae time for conversation." Mr. Redhorn dipped his brush and bent over the boat.

"I dinna believe ye let him gang."

"It's nae odds what ye believe, Peter Danks. Awa' hame an' pey attention to yer fish—that's to say if they're no' entirely beyond human aid."

"Ye'll be the laughin'-stock o' Fairport the nicht," retorted Danks, and strolled away.

In the dusk, Mr. Redhorn endured the good-natured banter of Mr. Matheson and two of the latter's friends, and, after their departure, the broader jibes of several of his neighbours. He painted doggedly until he could no longer see what he was doing, and then reluctantly quitted the scene of his labours, feeling beaten and affronted.

Within his bachelor apartment he drank some hot water and ate some dry bread, while he sadly eyed a fresh pot of jam purchased for the enjoyment of Willie, whom he had intended inviting to tea that evening.

Digitized by Google

"This ends it," Mr. Redhorn bitterly reflected. "This time I canna forgi'e him, even for his mither's sake. She'll ha'e to get him a job wi' somebody that's stricter nor me. I've excused him a score o' times, but he's gaun ower the score this time. I'm done wi' him. I'll dismiss him first thing the morn's mornin'. If he had the impiddence to show face the nicht, I believe I wud lift ma haun' to him, an' I've never done that to man nor beast. Aw! to think the laddie wud treat me like this, efter a' the chances he's had."

Mr. Redhorn further added to his wretchedness by brooding on the probable results of the lad's dismissal. While it would be a sad blow to the widow, it would doubtless prove a rich delight to Peter Danks; and Joseph was as averse from causing the least trouble to the one as from giving the slightest satisfaction to the other. Danks would never let him hear the end of it. Nevertheless, Joseph repeated to himself that he was done with Willie. At the same time he remembered that, after all, Willie had missed the menagerie—as if that were an extenuating circumstance!

About eight o'clock, his bodily misery having abated considerably, he endeavoured to settle his mind by reading a back number of the "Easychair Novels." As a rule, Mr. Redhorn quite lost himself in such pages, but on this occasion the customary charm seemed to be lacking. The tormented hero and distracted

Digitized by Google

heroine thrilled him not at all. In the midst of the villain's worst threats he looked anxiously at the door, listening.

He was afraid Willie might come after all; and he was unprepared to deal with the young sinner. He thought of going out for a long walk, but, on the other hand, he was unprepared to meet his jocular neighbours.

On the homeopathic principle, perhaps, of applying a counter-irritant, he got out a tattered ledger and pored over the accounts therein. But even the most overdue amongst them failed to produce sufficient irritation, and he went back to the novelette.

Five minutes later he flung it away, with the muttered remark:

"Pah! Thae leddies an' gents in stories dinna ken what real meesery means. Oh, Wullie, ye scamp, what wey could ye no' dae yer duty? But I'll warrant ye I dae mines, when I gi'e ye the kick the morn's mornin'!"

Just then there was a knock at the door—a soft apologetic knock.

"Oh, mercy!" breathed the painter, "is that him? . . . I'll pretend I'm no' in." Then he remembered that the lamp-light would be visible under the door.

The knock was repeated, a little louder.

"Be a man, Joseph!" said the painter to himself, rising as though rheumatism had claimed him for its own.

He went to the door as if walking on eggs.

Digitized by Google

Without opening it, he coughed and put the somewhat unnecessary question in a hoarse whisper—

"Is onybody there?"

"It's me—Mistress McWattie—Wullie's mither," came the reply. "I wud like a word wi' ye, Maister Ridhorn!"

"Oh, me! This is awfu'!" was his inward comment, as he opened the door. "Wull ye step in, Mistress McWattie?" he said aloud.

The comely widow stepped in and, without delay, said—

"I'm sorry to disturb ye, Maister Ridhorn, but Wullie wudna rest till I gaed wi' his message. He had an accident."

"A what?" exclaimed Joseph.

"He fell frae M'Fee's cairt on the road hame frae Ardmartin, an'——"

"Oh! . . . Is he sair hurtit?" gasped the painter, turning pale.

"Sair, but no' serious, I'm thenkfu' to say," replied the widow. "He twistit his ankle an' cut his haun' on the road, an' I'm feart he'll no' be fit for his wark the morn——"

"But is he sufferin'?"

"He's easier noo. But he's vexed, an' so am I, that——"

"Ye're sure it's no' serious?"

"Oh, ay. The doctor says it'll no' be lang till he's better. Did ye gi'e him leave to gang to Ardmartin, Maister Ridhorn? He said nae.

Digitized by Google

thing aboot that, an' I hope he hasna been daein' onything to displease ye."

Mr. Redhorn stroked his long nose and smoothed his scanty hair ere he replied—

"I—I made nae objections to him gaun to Ardmartin, Mistress McWattie. An' did ye say he was easier noo?"

"Ay. I'm gled he wasna daein' onything wrang. But I maun gi'e ye his message," said the widow, presenting an envelope. "He wrote it doon, though it hurt him to write. He said it was a private secret—I'm sure it's the first he ever kep' frae his mither," she added, laughing a little sadly. "But ye've been a great benefactor to ma laddie, Maister Ridhorn."

Joseph took the envelope, and, going close to the lamp, opened it.

On a sheet of paper was written in a schoolboy hand the following:—

"MR. J. REDHORN, painter, etc., Fairport.

"*Sire*,—I am very sorry I went to Ardmartin on the sly. There was no mennagery. I fell out the cart and hurt my foot and hand. I hope you will forgive me for doing so. You told me you done the same when in the days of your youth. Please do not give me the kick as your master should have done. With kind regards,

"Your faithfull apprentice,

"W. M'WATTIE."

Mr. Redhorn put the letter in his pocket, and cleared his throat. He realized that the widow was looking at him curiously. He reddened.

"I'm greatly obleeged to ye," he said. "This

Digitized by Google

letter was to remind me o' something I had forgot, Mistress McWattie. Wullie's a rale clever writer. Is—is there onything I can dae to help ye—an' him? He's no' to fash hissel' aboot his wark. Tell him that."

"Thenk ye," she returned. "Ye're rale kind. I'll gi'e him yer message. He said I was to ask ye for an answer."

"Weel, that's ma answer—he's no' to fash hissel'. An'—an'—this——" Mr. Redhorn took from the table the fresh pot of jam and forced it into the widow's protesting hands—"this is the rest o' ma answer."

Presently she made to take her departure, saying—

"I doot ye're ower kind to Wullie, Maister Ridhorn. He's a wild laddie, an' I'm feart he whiles gi'es ye a heap o' trouble."

"Oh," said Joseph cheerfully, "it's no' worth the mention. He's young. He's aye learnin'. In the days o' ma youth I was jist the same—maybe waur. 'Deed, I daursay I was a lot wilder. Ay, was I! I was a reg'lar wee rascal—in fac', I was a fair demon!"

"Aw, I'm sure ye wasna, Maister Ridhorn!"

"Ah, but I was! I was jist a—a perfec' deevil!—excuse me. Thur pancakes ye sent me per yer son was deleecious—maist sumptuous—entirely——" Here Mr. Redhorn became confused.

"I'll bid ye guid-nicht," said the comely

Digitized by Google

widow. "An' thenk ye for a' yer kindness to Wullie."

"He's welcome. Could I—could I get seein' him the morn's nicht, think ye?"

"He wud be prood to see ye. Come an' tak' yer tea wi' us."

She was gone ere he had stammered all his thanks. He would have liked to escort her, but even at fifty he was shy.

He closed the door softly and went back to the fire, rubbing his hands with satisfaction.

"Puir laddie!" he murmured. "He's been punished enough. I'm gled it's no' serious."

He took out Willie's letter and re-read it.

"In the days o' ma youth," he sighed . . . then laughed. "But I'm no' a Methuselah yet!"

Digitized by Google

VIII

HIS NEW YEAR QUEST

MR. REDHORN had taken the journey to Glasgow with a single purpose in view—the purchase of a New Year card. It must not be supposed that Fairport was so benighted that such an article could not be obtained in the village. As a matter of fact, the local post-office window had been gay for weeks with Christmas and New Year greetings—"in styles and at prices which would be found to compare favourably with any in the city."

But Joseph Redhorn shrank from entering the post-office for anything more sentimental than postage stamps and stationery. And he wanted to send a card for the New Year to the comely widow, Mrs. McWattie. He was old-fashioned enough to reserve his good wishes and congratulations for the first of January.

"I wudna think twice aboot gaun in, if it was a comic caird I was seekin'," he reflected. "But it's no' a comic caird I'm wantin', an' I couldna endure Peter's scrutiny. Peter wud mak' a blackamoor rid i' the face jist wi' lookin' at him."

Digitized by Google

So about three o'clock on a wet afternoon, Mr. Redhorn stood before a large window in Argyle Street, Glasgow, surveying the cards which remained hanging within, though Christmas Day was past.

"It's a mercy it's wat," he said to himself. "If it had been fine, some o' the Fairport folk wud ha'e been in Glesca for certain, an' I wud ha'e got detectit afore noo. Tits!" he exclaimed a little irritably, as the umbrella of a passerby tipped his hat over his nose. "I wish I had pit on ma saft bunnet. This pot hat's a perfec' fiasco." With both hands he drew it down till his head ached, and resumed his contemplation of the cards.

"It's no' jist as easy as I thocht it wud be," he told himself at the end of twenty minutes. "The cairds is richt enough, but nane o' the remarks is exac'ly suitable. *A Happy New Year* is correc', but it's no' oreeginal. *A Bright an' Prosperous New Year* is maybe mair oreeginal, but it doesna soun' nateral. *A Guid New Year* is honest, but it's kin' o' plain. *For Auld Lang Syne* is a nice motto, but it's a wee thing conveevial for ma purpose. *A New Year Greetin'*—weel, there's mair weys o' greetin' nor the yin, an' I wudna like ma meanin' to be disconstrued."

Mr. Redhorn stroked his nose and sighed.

"The warst o' poetry is that it whiles hasna suffeecient meanin', an' whiles has ower

Digitized by Google

muckle." He eyed a card whereon were printed the following lines in purple and gold—

"Old friends are best, and so I send
An old friend's wish to you, old friend.
May choicest blessings from above
Be yours, with human joy and love!"

"It's no' bad, but it's no' jist suitable. She's no' that auld, an' neither am I. . . . What does thon yin say?" He strained his eyes and read—

"May New Year's Day be spent in fun
With turkey, pies, and currant bun!"

"Oh, that's no' the thing ava'! What's the use o' spendin' yin day in fun, when it means that ye'll spend maybe three days in meesery, if no' acute agony? 'Turkey, pies, an' currant bun!' Criftens! What a conglomeration to mak' a poem aboot! A body wud think turkeys was to be had for the askin'. But I suppose that caird is intendit for gentry. . . . Thonder anither. Aw, I canna mak' it oot. The writin's ower fancy—it's a' curly-wurlies an' flourishes. Here anither."—

"With loving and hearty
Wishes for your happiness
And prosperity in
The Coming year."

Mr. Redhorn read the lines three times very carefully. "Aw, that's no' a nice like thing to dae—to prent a thing to look like poetry,

Digitized by Google

when it's jist or'nar' readin'. That's what I ca' a rank deception."

He was turning to another card, when a message boy bearing a heavy basket passed. The corner of the basket caught him in the ribs and caused him to stagger and gasp.

"Can ye no' look whaur ye're gaun, laddie?" said Mr. Redhorn wrathfully.

"Ye wis blockin' the pavement," retorted the boy cheekily.

"I was what?" cried the painter, stepping forward.

"Och, awa' hame an' eat turnips!" With these words, which were accompanied by a most impudent grin, the boy disappeared in the crowd, leaving Mr. Redhorn paralyzed with indignation.

"Eat turnips!" he muttered at last. "What——"

A young man in a hurry ran into him, apologized briefly, and fled. Mr. Redhorn staggered lightly against an elderly woman, stepped back, and collided rather heavily with an old gentleman.

"I beg yer——"

"Blundering idiot!" spluttered the old gentleman, giving the painter a violent push.

Mr. Redhorn, furious, reeled into the door of the shop before whose window he had stood so long.

"Come away, now. Out of this!" cried the shopkeeper.

Digitized by Google

Regaining his balance, Joseph stared.

"Out of this!" cried the shopkeeper again.

"What?"

"What do you want?" the shopkeeper asked in a milder tone. "I see you're all right, but from the way you came in I thought you were——" He paused and smiled suggestively.

Mr. Redhorn did not, however, respond to the smile. Drawing himself up, he glared across the counter, and in a loud, though high and quavering voice, said haughtily—

"I was intendin' to buy a New Year caird aff ye, but noo that I've inspec'it them, I wudna tak' yin o' yer uglies in a gift. Keep them till February, an' they'll dae fine for mock valenteens."

And feeling very hot, but not altogether unhappy, he quitted the shop.

He found another shop, and decided to enter without viewing the stock of cards in the window.

A bright-eyed young woman hastened to wait upon him.

"I was wantin' a New Year caird," he said, and suddenly felt uncomfortable. The young woman's eyes were so bright that she seemed to be inwardly amused.

"What kind of card would you like?" she inquired pleasantly.

"Weel," said Joseph slowly, "I've no' jist

Digitized by Google

decidet. . . . Er—What kin' o' cairds ha'e ye got?" he asked with a sudden and happy inspiration.

The young woman indicated several trays containing cards at different prices, and invited Mr. Redhorn to make his choice. Mr. Redhorn, with fingers that trembled, began to turn over the cards. The young woman assisted him, now and then holding up a card for his inspection. He wished that a customer would come in to occupy the young woman's attention till he made his selection. Then it occurred to him that he would have to exhibit his choice to her in the long run. Already he felt that she had guessed his guilty secret. She would persist in holding up cards with something about "love" on them. He blushed till his collar began to feel sticky at the back.

"This is a very pretty one—threepence," said the young woman. "It's a most artistic card."

Joseph was compelled to look at it. It was really a dainty thing, and inside the following couplet was clearly printed—

"The New Year comes! I think of thee,
And pray that you may think of me!"

"There isn't a prettier card in the box," said the young woman.

"Thenk ye; but I think I'll ha'e this yin," said the painter hoarsely. "What's the price?"

Digitized by Google

"A penny." She looked disappointed.

Joseph produced the coin. "Never heed paper," he said, and stuffing the hideous "comic" picture of a fat pig into his pocket, he rushed from the shop.

"I've pit her aff the scent onywey," he reflected as he sought another shop. "I wudna wonder if the lass kent me by sicht. There's that mony picnics to Fairport in the simmer."

In the third shop he purchased a lead pencil from a youth near the door rather than risk being attended to by a girl further along the counter.

"I'll ha'e a keek in first," he said to himself on reaching a fourth shop.

The sight of an elderly and severe-looking lady encouraged him, and he entered.

"I was wantin' a New Year caird," he said, and smiled broadly and foolishly from sheer nervousness.

"These are a penny each," said the lady solemnly, laying a tray of "comics" before him.

"Aw!" said Mr. Redhorn helplessly.

"Are these not what you want?" The lady's voice was almost threatening.

"Ay, this'll dae fine." The painter chose a grotesque representation of a nigger in a snowstorm, paid his penny, and hurried away.

"I'll gi'e the comics to Wullie," he told himself, as he walked rapidly over the greasy pave-

Digitized by Google

ments in the dismal drizzle. "I never thocht I wud ha'e sic' a deeficulty in buyin' a romantic caird. I doot I'm no' brazen-faced enough for the operation. But I'll get the correc' caird yet!"

Presently he came to a shop whose proprietor called himself a newsagent, stationer, and tobacconist. At the moment of Joseph's entry the proprietor was a tobacconist—at any rate, he was smoking a cigarette and talking to another man about a horse.

He gave Mr. Redhorn an inquiring glance.

"I was wantin' a New Year caird," said Joseph, using the now familiar formula.

"Choose your pick," returned the proprietor, pointing to a revolving holder. He then resumed his conversation about the horse.

Mr. Redhorn glanced at his watch. He would have to make haste to choose, if he wanted to catch his train.

A column of post-card actresses smiled at him, so he made the holder revolve; whereupon a column of ministers looked at him, he fancied, reprovingly; then more actresses.

"Whit kin' o' gemm is this?" he muttered crossly, and turned the holder rather harshly.

A sheaf of cards fell at his feet.

"Canny, man!" remarked the proprietor.

Mr. Redhorn restrained himself, picked up the cards and returned them to their niches.

"Keep on revolving," observed the pro-

Digitized by Google

prietor; "it'll not get giddy." And he went on chatting with his friend.

Joseph was rewarded at last. He came upon some quite attractive cards.

"I best no' tak' yin wi' poetry," he thought. "I've nae time to analyze it."

And he fixed on a card tied with pale blue ribbon.

"I'll tak' this yin."

"Fourpence. It's a dear card, but it's printed in real gold on genuine ivory. Here's an envelope." The proprietor took Mr. Redhorn's sixpence, handed him twopence, and returned to talking about the horse.

Mr. Redhorn ran for his train, and caught it with exactly twelve minutes to spare. There were few travellers that afternoon.

Shortly after the train had started he took from his breast pocket the envelope containing the card.

He extracted the card. He smiled with gentle satisfaction.

"I never seen a bonnier New Year caird," he said to himself. "I wudna say but what she'll like it. I hope she'll no' tell Wullie, though. . . . Ay, it's a rale pretty pictur on the ootside. An' it's maybe as weel no' to ha'e ower muckle prentin' in the inside. Criftens! I've never lookit at the inside."

He opened the card, and read

A MERRY CHRISTMAS.

Digitized by Google

IX

HIS SPECTACLES

"NO, Joseph," said the Kinlochan doctor, smiling, "it isn't your old enemy, dyspepsia. You may take my word for that."

"I'm relieved to hear ye say it, Doctor," the painter returned. "It wud ha'e been a sair disapp'intment to be informed I had gotten dyspepsia again, efter near twa month o' impunity frae the same, no' to mention twinty-odd bottles o' meddicine at twa shillin's the bottle. Ay, I'm greatly relieved, but—but, if ye please, what's gi'ein' me that nesty wee pain in ma heid? I hope it's no' ony disorder o' ma —ma brain. That wud be waur nor ma auld affliction."

"Oh, your brain's all right. But you've been straining your eyes. I'll give you a note to a friend of mine—a specialist—in Glasgow, and he will test your sight and give you a prescription for glasses suitable to your case." The doctor sat down at his table and picked up a pen.

"Glesses!" gasped Mr. Redhorn, grabbing the back of a chair.

Digitized by Google

"Or spectacles, if you prefer them. Probably spectacles would be more convenient for your work."

"Oh, Doctor, am I gaun blin'?"

The doctor looked up and laughed reassuringly. "Nonsense, man! Your eyes will serve you to the end of the chapter, but they require a little protection and assistance, as do the eyes of thousands of younger men than you. How old are you?"

"Fifty-twa, accordin' to the certeeficate o' ma birth, whereon it is statit that Joseph Ridhorn——"

"All right, Joseph. Your eyes will serve you till you're a hundred. Don't worry about them." He proceeded to write the note, and Mr. Redhorn watched him, keeping silence with difficulty.

"There," said the doctor, handing him the note in an addressed envelope. "Doctor Evans will soon put you right, and I've no doubt, if you ask him, he'll show you a picture which will explain why you require spectacles, and what a simple matter it is after all."

"Thenk ye, thenk ye, Doctor," replied the painter, taking the letter gingerly. "Ye're vera kind, an' I'm greatly obleeged to ye. But —but could ye no' gi'e me a bottle for ma sicht?"

The doctor checked a laugh. "There are some cures that cannot be put in bottles, Joseph," he said gravely.

Digitized by Google

"Or peells?" Mr. Redhorn asked, clinging to a straw. "I'm a perfec' marvel for takin' meddicine in ony shape or form, an' in ony quantity. Ye can rest assured that I'll tak' onything ye like to mix, wi' the utmaist regularity, though the taste wud baffle description. Please, Doctor——"

"My good man, be reasonable. Do you think that, if I could help you, I would send you to another doctor? And I have already given you my word that your sight will remain first-rate, if you only give it a little assistance and protection. Don't you believe me?"

"Ay, Doctor. It's no' that I'm feared o' lossin' ma sicht," said Mr. Redhorn in deep dejection. "It's——" He paused.

"What is it?"

"Weel, Doctor," the painter stammered, "did ye—did ye ever see a penter wi' specs?"

"I can't remember that I have," the doctor replied. "But no doubt, many painters use them."

"*I* never seen a penter wi' specs. *Never!*" said Mr. Redhorn dismally. "In ma opeenion a penter wi' specs wud be a—a—monstrosity."

"Am I a monstrosity?" asked the doctor, smiling through his glasses.

"You're no' a penter, if ye'll excuse me sayin' it. An' I'm tellin' ye that Joseph Ridhorn wi' specs'll be the laughin' stock o' Fairport."

"Nonsense, Joseph! Fairport will get used to the spectacles as soon as you will—which

Digitized by Google

will be in less than no time. You can't sacrifice your sight to a little thing like that. Really," added the doctor chaffingly, "I had no idea you were so conceited, Joseph."

"It's no' consate, Doctor," the painter dully replied. "But I've aye had an objection to bein' unique in ony wey. I never set up to be an Adonis ony mair nor a—a gladiator, for example; but I've an ambeetion to get through this warld wi'oot attractin' public attention by or'nar'. Hooever," he went on, "if Providence has decreed that Joseph Ridhorn is to dae the rest of his pentin', paper-hangin', an' decoratin' wi' specs on his nose, there's nae use makin' ony ootcry. I'll gang to Glesca the morn's mornin', Doctor, an' if ye hear o' a riot in Fairport on ma return, ye'll ken the reason. Guid-day to ye, an' thenk ye kindly for yer advice an' this letter."

"Good-bye, Joseph, and I expect to hear soon that you have found the spectacles a great help."

"Weel, weel, I hope they'll prove a blessin' in disguise," said Mr. Redhorn, not very hopefully, and, putting his hat on his sparsely covered head, he took his departure.

During the four-mile walk from Kinlochan to Fairport he brooded upon the subject, and so increased his depression. He was a modest, bashful creature, and had an intense horror of ridicule. The Fairport folk, especially the youngsters, knew his weakness, and took fre-

Digitized by Google

quent and full advantage of it. Joseph prayed that the oculist would prescribe nothing worse than clear spectacles. "Guid kens what I'll dae if I've got to weer bew yins or the kind like wee meat-safes."

He reached home in a nervous condition, and made a poor evening meal, forgetting for the first time in eighteen months to take his dose of physic.

About eight o'clock Willie McWattie arrived.

"Weel, what is't ye want, Wullie?" he asked a trifle impatiently.

Willie looked hurt. "Ye said I was to come the nicht, Maister Ridhorn."

"Did I? Weel——"

"I was to get a lesson at the grainin'."

"'Deed, so ye was!" cried the painter, self-reproachful. "It was stupit o' me to forget, laddie, but I didna mean it. Rin roon' to the shed—here the key—an' bring the board an' the pots an' the rags that ye'll see on the shelf ablow the winda. I pit them there to be ready for ye, afore I gaed to Kinlochan the day. Canny wi' the wee pot o' vernish—it's near the brim. An' I'll sune gi'e ye a lesson."

Willie sped on his errand, and returned with the articles required.

"It wud ha'e been better in daylicht," Mr. Redhorn observed as he lit the lamp. "But we canna ha'e everything. Can we, Wullie?"

"Na," said Willie carelessly.

"It's a peety when man has got to use the

Digitized by Google

artifeecial for want o' the nateral. Eh, Wullie?"

"Ay," replied the boy absent-mindedly, his eyes on the painted board.

Mr. Redhorn sighed, picked up a brush, and proceeded with the lesson.

"Weel, I think ye've got a bit notion o' the art o' grainin', Wullie," said the painter, an hour later. "I'll gi'e ye anither lesson some ither nicht, an' I'll get ye a board to practise on. Practice mak's perfec'! Mind that, Wullie."

"Did you practise a lot when ye was young, Maister Ridhorn?"

"I did that, Wullie."

"An' hoo lang did it tak' ye to get perfec'?"

"Oh, a lang time, laddie, a lang, lang time."

"A month, Maister Ridhorn?"

"A month! Criftens! A month!"

"Sax month?"

"Years, Wullie, years an' years!" cried the painter.

Willie looked disappointed and picked up his cap. "It's time I was gaun hame," he said.

Mr. Redhorn suddenly departed from his intention of giving his apprentice a little lecture on "Practice and Perfection."

"Wullie," he said abruptly, "did ye ever see a penter pentin' wi' specs on?"

For a moment the boy gaped with astonishment. Then he shook his head, and said: "I

Digitized by Google

never seen ony penter but yersel', Maister Ridhorn."

"Hoo dae ye think a penter wud luk wi' specs on, Wullie?"

"Kin' o' comic-like," replied Willie, after a glance at his master.

Mr. Redhorn turned away to hide his scarlet countenance.

"Ye best gang hame noo, Wullie," he said, controlling his voice. "Ye needna come to yer wark the morn's mornin', for I'll no' be here. I—I'm gaun to the toon to—to become kin' o' comic-like."

The cap slipped from the boy's fingers.

"Ye're gaun to get specs!" he exclaimed, making for the door. But he took courage and halted halfway. "I—I didna mean that you wud be—what I said," he whispered. "As sure as onything, I didna, Maister Ridhorn."

"I accep' yer apology," said Mr. Redhorn with melancholy dignity, touched by his apprentice's evidently sincere regret. Whatever the boy's faults were, his master had not found disloyalty one of them.

"Plenty folk weers specs," remarked Willie, regaining confidence. "It's jist the young yins that looks comic-like."

"I'm no' exactly a Methuselah, Wullie," the painter returned with a wan smile.

Willie missed the point but caught the smile, such as it was. "Ye'll be able to see furder wi' specs," he said cheerfully.

Digitized by Google

Mr. Redhorn sighed. "I doot I'll create a sensation in Fairport," he muttered.

"Eh?" said Willie, the remark escaping him.

"Aw, naething, laddie. Awa' hame wi' ye. Bide a meenute! Here yer wages. I forgot the morn was Seturday. Ye'll no' be late on Monday mornin'?"

"Nae fears! Thenk ye," said Willie, taking the silver. "But—but ye've gi'ed me a shillin' ower mony."

"That's a rise, Wullie," said the painter kindly. "Ye can tell yer mither I'm pleased wi' ye."

Willie knew very well that he did not deserve any advance in his wages, but that knowledge did not detract from his gratitude, and he mentally registered a vow to do better in future. Had he registered all vows of that nature for the last twelve months in a book, it would have shown a startling number of entries, but after all, the ordinary boy's good intentions should be regarded as stepping rather than paving stones.

"I hope yer mither's weel," said Mr. Redhorn, "an' no' workin' ower hard. Help her a' ye can, Wullie. The only son o' a weeda has great responsibeelities, but his reward'll be a' the greater. Guid-nicht, Wullie, an' dinna forget a' yer lesson at grainin'."

It was a dirty evening. A heavy sea rolled up the loch, and the south wind carried lash-

Digitized by Google

ing squalls of rain. In the dusk the steamer had some difficulty in taking the pier.

Mr. Redhorn stood in the lee of the deck-house, and watched the shore with misgivings. Few people were out of doors, but to the nervous painter the few seemed legion.

"What a day!" he said to himself. "Seaseeck in the mornin'. Then gettin' ma sicht testit wi' a maygic lantern an' ither fearsome contrivances—but he was a kind man, a' the same. Then gettin' ma specs fittit on by an impiddent young chap that stared at ma nose as if it was a curiosity, an' tell't me I was extremely difficult for to fit. Then eatin' a plate o' mince—gey tasty, I admit, but no' the thing for me in ma disturbed condeetion. Then lossin' ma train, an' waitin' three 'oors for the next. Then an 'oor of meesery on the boat. An' noo—*noo* to appear afore the public of Fairport as a monstrosity, a comicality, a penter wi' specs on his nose!" Mr. Redhorn groaned. "But I'm no' gaun to shrink frae the ordeal. An' the suner it's ower the better. Here goes!"

From an innner pocket he produced a leather case, from which, with chilled fingers, he extracted the new spectacles.

"Nesty dangerous things!" he muttered, as he adjusted them. "I near pit the spoke in ma e'e instead o' ower ma ear. Bless me, they're blin' wi' the rain a'ready!" He took

Digitized by Google

them off and wiped them; replaced them, and pulled his hat over his brows, bending his head, to protect the glasses from the rain.

The steamer was warped to the pier at last, and rose and fell on the heavy swell. The gangway was put out from the paddlebox, and the purser shouted: "All for Fairport, quickly, please."

To his horror Mr. Redhorn realized that he was the sole passenger for Fairport. With a supreme effort of will he prevented his hand from tearing off the spectacles. He stumbled up the steps of the gangway, and handed the purser his spectacle case.

"Ticket, ticket!" cried the official impatiently, and Mr. Redhorn, with incoherent apologies, made the necessary exchange.

"Noo for the jeers o' the populace," he muttered to himself, dashing past the men holding the pier end of the gangway.

The piermaster, along with several villagers, awaited him at the covered exit.

Joseph Redhorn's knees almost failed him. There was yet time to remove the spectacles, but he clenched his hands till the case in one of them cracked, and went forward, his head held low against a rain squall.

Suddenly the piermaster's lantern shone in his face.

"Weel, I'm blest!" exclaimed the piermaster, "if I didna think ye was Professor Fisken that was here in the summer. Look at

Digitized by Google

him, lads," he added to the villagers. "Is he no' rale like the Professor?"

"The vera image!"

"Dod, it's extr'ornar'!"

"I never seen onything like it!"

"He micht be the Professor's twin-brither!"

Such were the replies to the piermaster's query. Nobody laughed. Nobody even smiled.

"I suppose it's ma specs," said Joseph, very bashfully.

"Nae doot," said the piermaster. "But I didna ken ye needit specs, Joseph. I hope there's naething serious wrang wi' yer sicht, man."

The others expressed similar sympathetic aspirations.

Mr. Redhorn, almost overcome by his kindly reception, repeated, more or less correctly, the great oculist's diagnosis, and assured his neighbours that, with the aid of the spectacles, his eyes were good for ever.

Whereupon his neighbours congratulated him.

"We'll ha'e to ca' ye 'Professor,' Joseph," said the piermaster with pleasant jocularity. "Ye sud be rale prood to be the vera image o' yin o' the greatest scientists in a' the warld. But ye'll be wantin' hame. Ye're drookit. Guid-nicht, Professor, an' I'm pleased to hear it's naething serious."

Mr. Redhorn paid his penny and went his

Digitized by Google

way, followed by good-natured cries of "Guidnicht, Professor." And he went with his head high and a smile on his undistinguished countenance.

Professor Fisken, the renowned electrician! The summer visitor who had won the hearts of all Fairport with his homely ways and unassuming generosity! If such a man wore spectacles, who was Joseph Redhorn that he should scorn them?

On reaching his lonely dwelling the painter lit the lamp and rushed to the tiny mirror before which he shaved his thin cheeks and brushed his scanty hair.

Yes! There was no doubt about it. The likeness was quite remarkable. Mr. Redhorn could not sing, but he whistled as he stirred the fire and put the kettle on.

Next day being Sunday he went to church, not so confident until neighbours began to congratulate him on his resemblance to the great man and on the fact that his eye-trouble was not serious.

"Professor Ridhorn" became forthwith a household word in Fairport, and the painter neither made nor felt the slightest objection. And when, during the first few days, the children were crazy to acquire the cast-off wires of aërated-water bottles, in order that with "specs" constructed from the same they might play at being "Professor Ridhorn," the painter

Digitized by Google

took it all in good part and patted each little head while he held his own a trifle higher.

"I like ye best in specs, Maister Ridhorn," said Willie shyly, as he and his master set out to a job on the Monday.

"What wey that, Wullie?" inquired his master, also rather shyly.

"They gar ye look awfu' kind," said Willie. "Jist as kind as ye are," he added with an effort.

Willie may have been unoriginal, but he was not insincere, when he quoted the words that he had heard his mother say the previous afternoon.

Digitized by Google

X

HIS NEIGHBOURS' DEEDS OF KINDNESS

MR. JOHN GORRIE sat up in his chair and gaped at his visitor, Mr. Bob Smilie, the laziest jobbing gardener in Fairport.

"Ye're tryin' to cod me," he said at last. "Ten pound! I dinna believe it."

"It's the solemn truth," returned the visitor, who five minutes ago had experienced some difficulty in gaining admittance to the untidy abode of his bachelor acquaintance. We do not say "friend," because Messrs. Gorrie and Smilie were not the sort of men who deal much in friendship.

"It's the solemn truth," the latter repeated. "As sune as the concert was by, the meenister got up and says, says he: 'Ma dear freen's, I've a splendit announcement to announce to ye a' wi' her leddyship's kind permeesion. Ye a' ken what an interest her leddyship tak's in Fairport, an' hoo gled she is to see Fairport improvin' and gettin' mair respectable-like——'"

"Did he say that? For if he did, he's a

Digitized by Google

leear," put in Mr. Gorrie, who did not approve of ministers.

"He said something vera near it, onywey," replied Mr. Smilie. "An' then he says, says he: 'Ma dear freen's an' fellow Fairportonians, her leddyship has a notion that Fairport can be still furder improved; an', to encourage ye a' to improve, she's wrote me this letter frae London, offerin' twa prizes o' ten pound each—yin for adults an' yin for juveniles. An' the prizes is to gang to the adult an' the juvenile that does the kindest deed atween this date and the end o' the year. I am to report a' the kind deeds to her leddyship, wi'oot tellin' the names of the deeders—I meant for to say doers—an' she'll decide which gets the prizes; an' the prizes'll be presentit on the first day o' the New Year, at noon, prompt!' An' that's the solemn truth, John Gorrie. What think ye aboot it?"

"Her leddyship's daft," said Mr. Gorrie. "But I suppose she'll keep her word."

"Oh, there's nae fear o' her no' cashin' up when the time comes. I hope," Mr. Smilie sniggered, "ye'll no' forget to mention *ma* kind deed to the meenister, John."

"What d'ye mean?"

"Weel, was it no' a kind deed for me to come here, stracht frae the concert, to tell ye aboot the prize, so as ye could stert even wi' the ither folk—eh?"

"When I seen ye at ma door," said Mr.

Digitized by Google

Gorrie, very dryly, "I had the notion that ye had come to pey back the twa shillin's I lent ye three year syne. I didna think ye wud ha'e the neck to come to ma door wi' ony ither reason. I confess I had a dram in me at the time, itherwise I wudna ha'e been sae saft as to trust ye." It should be mentioned that three years previously Mr. Gorrie had retired from the joys and sorrows of bricklaying on a legacy.

"Ach, man," returned Mr. Smilie, with a hearty laugh, "what's twa shillin's? Let bygones be bygones—that's ma motto! I cam' hurryin' here the nicht, missin' the chance o' a bottle o' beer that Sandy M'Feat was thinkin' o' staun'in', him bein' greatly affectit wi' the idea o' kind deeds—I'm sayin' I cam' hurryin' here to gi'e ye the chance o' winnin' five pound!"

"Five!—ye said it was ten pound!"

"Ten pound dividet by twa is five. We're the twa that'll dae the dividin'. Twa heids is better nor yin—d'ye see?"

"It depends on the heids. But I see what ye mean." Mr. Gorrie's tone was a trifle less unpleasant. He stroked his grizzled whiskers.

"Of course we maun keep it a secret."

"Keep what a secret?"

"That you an' me is workin' in comp'ny."

"I thocht ye was gaun to say ye had a plan," said Mr. Gorrie, looking disappointed.

Mr. Smilie rubbed his chin and grinned.

"I want yer word that ye'll no' betray me, John."

Digitized by Google

"What wud I betray ye for?" Mr. Gorrie indignantly demanded.

"Ten pound," replied Mr. Smilie; adding, "Hooever, I'll trust ye."

"What's yer plan?"

Mr. Smilie suppressed a snigger.

"Man, it's that simple, John! Can ye no' guess?"

"Nane o' yer chaff!" retorted Mr. Gorrie, whose imagination was limited.

"Weel," said the other easily, "ye needna bite ma nose aff. The poseetion's jist this:—Afore fower weeks is by, ye've got to perform an extra'ornar' deed o' kindness; but afore ye can dae that, ye've got to find somebody to perform it on!"

"That's easy done."

"Is it? I tell ye, man, afore ye're a day aulder, the folk in Fairport'll be tumblin' ower each ither to perform deeds o' kindness. It'll no' be a case o' gettin' folk to gi'e kindness; the deeficulty'll be to get folk to tak' it. D'ye see?"

"Maybe ye're richt!" said Mr. Gorrie dubiously.

"Ay, I'm richt! An' this is whaur *I* come in, ma freen'; this is whaur *you* get the advantage o' yer neebours! On condeetion that ye pay me five pound on receipt o' the ten—when ye get it, of course—I'm ready an' willin' *to be performed on!* Ye can practise kind deeds on me, John, to wur mutual profit!" And Mr. Smilie grinned encouragingly.

Digitized by Google

A growl came from Mr. Gorrie.

"An' ye think I'm gaun to dae kind deeds to a man that's been owin' me twa shillin's for three year? No' likely! Ye better gang hame, Bob Smilie, an'——"

Bob held up a grimy hand.

"But wait!" he said in a soothing voice. "There's a reason why *you* should perform the kind deeds. I'm willin' to be the performer, but kind deeds frae me wudna be greatly noticed; whereas, if John Gorrie was to dae a kind deed, Fairport to a man wud be that astonished that the deed wud seem a hunner-and-fifty times as kind as it really was! An' afore ye stert operations, ye can tell everybody hoo bad I treatit ye regairdin' that loan o' twa shillin's, an' that'll mak' the kind deed look even kinder. Is that no' veesible to yer naked eye, as the sayin' is?"

"Ye're an impiddent character," said Mr. Gorrie sulkily. "I'm an aulder man nor you; it's me that sud get the deed o' kindness."

However, after half an hour of wrangling, he gave in on condition that his partner's share of the profit should be subject to a reduction of two shillings.

In comparative amity they forthwith proceeded to discuss details of the scheme propounded by Mr. Bob Smilie.

The prophecy of Mr. Smilie concerning "ither folk" proved only too true. It was

Digitized by Google

difficult, if not impossible, to discover in Fairport and its vicinity an individual willing to accept kindness in any shape or form. Indeed, several nasty quarrels occurred, and by the third week in December the Reverend Mr. Shelbroke was heartily wishing that her ladyship's letter proffering the prizes had never been penned.

It was now the day after Christmas, and popular feeling was, to put it mildly, running high. As someone expressed it, the folk were "like flees bein' droonded in the mulk o' human kindness." So keen was competition become that many of the vilagers, old as well as young, finding it out of the question to do anything for their fellows, had turned their gentle attentions to the humbler forms of creation. Not a horse was made to hurry; dogs were allowed all manner of liberties; stray cats were offered board and lodging, and practically encouraged to steal; even pigs were pampered. Locally, fowls for culinary purposes were unobtainable—under 5s. 6d. with an oath of secrecy. The plumber, having a hen that had injured its left leg, put the limb in splints, and refused to leave its side, even when a pipe burst in one of the villas. Everyone fed the birds. Mr. Danks, the fishmonger, heaved sighs over his wares, including the kippers and finnan haddies, as if he were grieved for them. A little girl was observed giving cream to a worm in a disused tobacco tin. Two small boys spent

Digitized by Google

the better part of a day in trying to coax a trapped mouse to eat four ounces of cheese; eventually they set it free in the baker's shop, and the baker, after clenching his hands and biting off a bad word, presented them with a tart apiece, whereupon the small boys gaily departed, promising to bring more mice on the same terms.

The weather was mild for the time of year. Joseph Redhorn, the painter, stood at his door, meditatively smoking a cigarette of the worst quality possible. But, as Joseph had more than once pointed out, it was cheaper to be a philosopher than a "connisewer." Business was extremely slack, as was to be expected at that season, and he had given his apprentice a holiday. "Mind, Wullie," he had said, "if I hear o' ye tryin' on ony deeds o' kindness, I'll reconseeder gi'ein' ye a rise in yer wages at the New Year. Awa' hame an' break sticks for yer mither."

Mr. Redhorn was not competing for the Deeds of Kindness Prize. He had been first amused, then irritated, by his neighbours' outbreaks of benevolence; nevertheless, he succeeded in restraining himself when anyone, as frequently happened, dropped hints, more or less obvious, of his or her latest "Deed." Somehow the people, knowing that Joseph was not a competitor, regarded him as a sort of recorder, whose evidence might be valuable later on.

Digitized by Google

"A fine day, Mr. Ridhorn."

A middle-aged woman had paused in her walk through the village.

"Ay, it's no' sae bad," he responded agreeably.

"I'm just takin' a new-laid egg to auld Mistress M'Phedron," said the woman carelessly, displaying the article named. "Puir body, I doot she's no' lang for this warld."

"If she can manage an egg," observed the painter, "she's no' that near to dissolution. To me that's subjec' to dyspepsia, an egg means meesery. It gars me desire naething but the tomb." He blew a whiff and spat out a considerable quantity of tobacco, and adjusted his spectacles.

"Eggs is terrible scarce the noo," said the woman, who was not interested in Mr. Redhorn's physical economy. "If I was sellin' mines, I could get twa-an'-nine the dizzen; but I'm sorry for Mistress M'Phedron."

"Hens ha'e nae conscience this weather," replied Joseph, ignoring the point; and the woman, after a wistful look at him, passed on.

"Fairport's gaun to pot," he said to himself. "I've seen the day when she wud ha'e gi'ed awa' a dizzen o' her eggs, an' never let bug to a livin' creature. . . . Fine mornin', John. What's new wi' ye?"

This to Mr. Gorrie, who had strolled up, wearing a conscious smirk on his naturally sour countenance.

Digitized by Google

"Ha'e ye got peyment o' yer twa shillin's yet?" inquired the painter.

Mr. Gorrie became solemn. "Oh, whisht, whisht!" he said in a loud whisper. "Dinna refer to that—I'm sayin', dinna refer to that."

"Weel," replied Mr. Redhorn, surprised, "I wudna ha'e referred to it, if you hadna been referrin' to naething else for the last twa-three weeks. 'Deed, I was under the impression that it was yer chief interest in this life here below; an' if Fairport hadna been ower busy daein' deeds o' kindness, it wud ha'e been the chief topic o' scandalous conversation. Has Smilie peyed ye the cash?"

"Oh, dinna mention cash, man; dinna mention it! I canna bear the mention o' it. Ha'e ye no' heard aboot Bob Smilie?"

"What? Has he done a slope?"

"Oh, man, man! What wey dae ye think evil aboot the puir body? D'ye ye no' ken he's lyin' badly in ma hoose?"

"Lyin' badly in your hoose? 'Deed, I'm sorry I spoke," said Mr. Redhorn, in mingled astonishment and apology. "What's wrang Has he met wi' an accident?"

Mr. Gorrie shook his head. "He was took bad wi' lumbago in his kist the nicht afore last."

"In your hoose?"

"No' exac'ly; but there's a leak in the roof o' his ain hoose, which is a meeserable, cauld place forbye; an' I couldna but offer him ma

Digitized by Google

ain comfortable bed; an' there he's lyin' noo, weel happit up, an' I'm daein' ma best for him. He thinks he's a wee thing easier the day, an' he had a notion for a pair o' kippers, so I cam' alang to buy them." Here Mr. Gorrie paused, as one who finds his conversation exhausted.

At last, Mr. Redhorn said slowly:—

"I can only say, John, that ye've acted uncommon weel."

"I couldna dae onything else," said Mr. Gorrie modestly. With an effort he met the other's eye, but as it seemed somewhat cold, he immediately became interested in the hills across the loch.

"Ay; ye've acted uncommon weel," repeated the painter. "Is Smilie sufferin'?"

"Agony . . . at least, he's no' sae bad the day. I wantit him to get the doctor; but he was like a madman. He says it's agin his releegion to deal wi' doctors."

"Some folk is like that," the painter admitted. "But ye micht try a plaster on him. I'll gi'e ye a sample of some I had for rheumatics."

"Thenk ye, thenk ye!" Expressions of relief and doubt were visible, in turn, on Mr. Gorrie's face.

Mr. Redhorn ran into his house.

"Efter ye've applied it," he said on his return, "ye best gang oot for a walk. It's a guid plaster, but it doesna improve the temper, an' Bob Smilie, when he's roused, is an orator!"

Digitized by Google

"Thenk ye, thenk ye," Mr. Gorrie repeated, not knowing what else to say regarding the remedy, a thin roll of paper, in his hand. "Aweel," he went on hastily, "I best see aboot the kippers; an' there's ither things I've to buy for him. When ye're lyin' badly ye can dae wi' a bit luxury, Ridhorn—eh?—espaycially when it's no' costin' ye onything? Ha, ha! Eh, Ridhorn? But I dinna grudge it, though I'm a puir man."

"Jist that," said the painter equably. "As I've already observed, ye've acted uncommon weel; but see an' no' ruin yersel'!"

Gorrie walked off in the direction of the shops. Within an hour Bob Smilie's indisposition was known to nearly every soul in Fairport. Unfortunately, the general feeling towards "the good Samaritan," as a very small minority designated Mr. Gorrie, was that of bitter jealousy with a desperate desire to "cut him out."

The minister had left the house of John Gorrie, not a little touched by that individual's devotion to his lodger and patient. Knowing well enough that in the past little love had been lost between the two men, he had at first doubted the host's sincerity, but after listening to the querulousness of the guest for ten minutes he had felt ashamed of his suspicions, and almost resigned to her ladyship's scheme for encouraging deeds of kindness. Nay, more,

Digitized by Google

he had practically decided to recommend John Gorrie for her ladyship's award.

"Man, John," said Mr. Smilie, who was now sitting up in bed, supping raspberry jam from a pot presented by a widow, and glancing over a weekly journal which had been handed in, with some ceremony, by Mr. Danks, the fishmonger, "Man, John, I could endure this agony for three month."

Mr. Gorrie grunted. He was engaged in trying to make his bed on four chairs, none of them being of similar height. The night was yet young, but he was consumed with sleep.

"Is ma supper no' near ready?" the invalid inquired.

"Supper! Ye'll get nae supper the nicht."

"What?"

"I'm tellin' ye, ye'll get nae supper the nicht. I'm ower wearit. I've had nae sleep for three nichts."

"Ye wud sleep better if ye didna snore," said Mr. Smilie cheerfully. "Hurry up wi' ma supper. I believe I could shift a pair o' poached eggs. Hurry up, John. Ye can ha'e an egg yersel', seein' we're in the midst o' plenty."

Plenty was precisely the word for it. For two days Fairport had simply showered benefits—chiefly in the shape of bodily sustenance—on the invalid. Unlike most of his neighbours, Mr. Smilie had made no attempt to discourage deeds of kindness on his own behalf.

Digitized by Google

"An' there's the cake that Mistress Donald sent yesterday," he went on. "I'll ha'e to taste it. Dinna let the fire get low. I micht as weel use the coals that Peter Henderson sent. He's a kind man, is Peter Henderson. If I was spreadin' his kindness abroad, it micht spile yer chance for the adult prize, John."

"See here!" cried Mr. Gorrie, "I'll see ye stiff afore I dae yer biddin' again, Bob Smilie."

Mr. Smilie sniggered. "Afore ye mak' the supper, ye can wash ma face. It's sticky wi' this jam. Mind I prefer the water luke-warm."

Mr. Gorrie was on the verge of an explosion, when a knock fell on the door. Hastily procuring some warm water in a basin, he placed it, with a towel, on a chair by the bedside, flung the almost empty jam-pot and the weekly journal under the bed, and breathlessly cursed the occupant thereof. He then opened the door.

"Come in, come in," he said softly, "but dinna mak' a noise."

Mr. Redhorn came in.

The invalid emitted a moan.

"I was jist for washin' his face," explained the host. "He feels it soothin'-like. An' then I was for makin' him a bit supper. He's got to keep up his strength."

Mr. Redhorn nodded. "I merely ca'ed to see if the plaster had done ony guid."

"Oh," said the sufferer, with a fearful

Digitized by Google

grimace, "it done me guid for the time bein', but it was terrible severe."

"'Deed, ay," added "the good Samaritan," rolling his eyes, "it raised an awfu' blister. I was sair vexed for him."

The painter looked from one to the other.

"That's vera interestin'," he remarked at last. "I never heard o' wall-paper at ninepence the piece daein' that afore."

Thereupon he took his departure.

"Ye muckle eediot!" said Mr. Gorrie.

"Ye dooble-dyed gowk!" retorted Mr. Smilie. "What wey did ye burn the thing wi'oot lukin' at it?"

"What wey did ye tell me to stap it in the fire?"

The conspirators glared angrily at each other.

Then Mr. Gorrie, without a word, rushed from the house. He overtook the painter at the latter's door.

"See here, Ridhorn," he said reproachfully, "it wasna fair to play a joke on a seeck man. It's true that I—I lost the plaster, or paper, or whatever it was, afore I had examined it; but Bob an' me didna want to hurt yer feelin's, so we decidet to let on we had used it. D'ye see?"

"Weel, weel," said Mr. Redhorn, "I'll forgi'e ye, for I perceive I'm no' blameless masel'. An' the least I can dae is to gi'e ye a genuine plaster for Smilie, wi'oot delay. Jist wait a jiffy."

Digitized by Google

A minute later Mr. Gorrie departed in possession of the genuine plaster and sundry instructions for its application.

"If I've time, I'll luk in the morn's mornin', an' see hoo he's gettin' on," Mr. Redhorn called after him.

Mr. Smilie protested forcibly, yet could not but submit himself to Mr. Redhorn's remedy. Throughout the night he gave vent to dire sounds. Mr. Gorrie, feigning slumber, quaked with inward mirth until he rolled off his bed of chairs, bruising himself rather severely. In the morning both men were decidedly short-tempered.

"Hurry up wi' ma breakfast," shouted the invalid, a little after eight o'clock.

"I'm hurryin'," retorted "the good Samaritan," and let fall an egg on the hearth-stone.

"I'll thenk ye no' to waste ma property," cried Smilie.

"What? Wha's property? The proveesions is nae mair yours nor mines."

"I beg yer paurdon! The deeds of kindness was done to *me*. They're *ma* property."

"They're *ma security* till I get the prize money."

Mr. Smilie sat up. "They're mines! I'm tellin' ye, the deeds o' kindness is mines; an' if ye want an egg or onything else for yer ain breakfast, ye've got to ask ma permeesion."

"Ask yer permeesion!" A spasm of rage contorted Mr. Gorrie's face, and he lifted an egg

Digitized by Google

in each hand. "Tak' that, an' that!" Mr. Gorrie fired the eggs in quick succession. They exploded against the wall, the target having dodged beneath the bed-clothes.

Mr. Redhorn stood in the doorway, smiling drily.

"I observe ye're gi'ein' him his breakfast," he remarked.

Mr. Gorrie said nothing; Mr. Smilie remained in concealment.

"But I didna come in to interrup' kind deeds," Mr. Redhorn continued. "As a matter o' fac', I'm assisting the meenister, this fine mornin', to spread a certain piece of news. In the first place, her leddyship, wha', as ye ken, has been traivellin' in London, an' the Continent o' Europe, arrived hame, per spaycial steamer, last nicht. An' afore she had even got a dish o' tea she sent for the meenister. They were closeted thegether, as the novelles say, for upwards of hauf an 'oor. At nine o'clock the meenister chappit at ma door. I was vexed for him." Again Mr. Redhorn paused. "I hope," he remarked, "Maister Smilie'll no' get suffocatit wi' his modesty——"

"See here!" began Mr. Gorrie.

"I see ye're anxious to get the news. Weel, it appears that her leddyship has had nae correspondence wi' the meenister during the last sax month. It appears likewise that the letter the meenister got the day o' the concert was nae mair nor a hoax—a vile hoax, the meenister

Digitized by Google

ca'ed it. The author is unknown, but I suspect a certain vera jocular young gent that was bidin' in Fairport in September. Hooever, the p'int is that the Deeds o' Kindness Compiteetion is cancelled—in ither words, up a gum tree. Her leddyship was greatly annoyed an' distressed that sic a hoax sud be played in her name, and I've to inform ye that she has providet funds for to pey for a tea-meetin', cinematograph, and phonograph entertainment on the third o' January, prox., to which a' Fairport is cordially invited. Afore leavin' ye to recover frae yer gratefu' stupefaction, I wud just like to encourage ye to conteenue in daein' kind deeds. I observe a conseederable supply o' proveesions an' ither articles in these premises o' yours; an' I happen to be aware that there's a conseederable want o' the same in the premises occupied by the weeda Morrison an' her five sma' offsprings——"

"Get oot o' this!" bawled Mr. Gorrie.

"I'm merely offerin' ye a suggestion," Mr. Redhorn went on placidly. "If ye accep' it afore dinner-time, I'm dumb. Itherwise——" He turned and departed.

Mr. Smilie uncovered his face.

"I'm thinkin', John, ye wud prefer me to be dumb likewise," he said brightly; adding: *"Hurry up wi' ma breakfast, an' then I'll see if I can rise."*

Digitized by Google

XI

HIS DISTRESS

MR. REDHORN was in high spirits. The New Year had begun well—so well that he had been compelled to engage the assistance of a journeyman painter from Glasgow to enable him to cope with the work he had undertaken. He had actually felt justified in offering the Glasgow man a six weeks' engagement, at the very least.

"There's naething like tred—when it's guid," he remarked gaily to Willie in the shop, one February morning. "It's a lang while since I had to get a man frae Glesca. It'll be near seeven year. . . . But he wasna a great success," he added thoughtfully.

"What was wrang wi' him?" inquired Willie, who was industriously stirring something in a large pot.

"Aw—he was ower sentimental, Wullie."

"Eh?"

"Weel, he was a young man, ye see, an' he hadna been here a roon' o' the clock afore he had a lass. I forget wha she was—but she was a rale nice lass—an' I had nae fau't to fin' wi' the man's ch'ice. He was in earnest, tae; for a

Digitized by Google

year efter he left Fairport he cam' back an' mairrit her. I was invitet to the waddin', but at that time I had to avoid social joys, bein' a martyr o' dyspepsia. But that's no' the p'int. The p'int is that he let his amorous feelin's get the better o' his professional yins. Love's young dream is a' vera fine, but a man canna mak' a dacent job o' a winda-shutter when he's aye keekin' oot the winda to see if his lass is comin' alang the road. Ye canna dae twa things at the same time, Wullie. Mind that! If Providence had intendit a man to dae twa things at yinst, Providence wud ha'e pit yin o' his e'en at the back o' his heid."

"Then every man wud need to be bald-heidit at the back," remarked Willie, with a snigger.

"Pey attention to yer wark, laddie," said Mr. Redhorn a little shortly.

"But what else did the young man dae forbye sp'ilin' the shutter?"

"Aw, I canna mind a' he did, Wullie," said Mr. Redhorn, recovering his good humour. "The shutter was merely a feegure o' speech. I mind he papered a bedroom wi' the paper upside doon; but it was a paper o' a vera confused design, an' I decidet to say naething aboot it unless the leddy that owned the hoose mentioned it. I felt kin' o' dishonest for twathree year efter, but the leddy never said onything, an' at last a pipe burst an' floodit the room, so I had the pleesure o' hingin' a new paper. It's a true sayin' that silence is golden,

Digitized by Google

Wullie, though I canna say I look back wi' pride to that parteeclar example. But I hadna the hert to expose the young man, an' I admit I wasna sorry to save aboot thirty shillin's."

"Ye didna let *me* aff sae easy," said Willie in an aggrieved tone of voice, "when I pit the wrang pent on thon meat-safe."

Mr. Redhorn smiled. "Weel, weel," he said mildly, "I'll maybe be mair lenient wi' ye, Wullie, when ye get a lass—when ye're in the throes o' Love's young dream."

"I wudna be sae daft!" the boy muttered scornfully, reddening. "Did ye gi'e the silly chap the kick efter he hung the paper upside doon?" he hastened to inquire.

"Na; I kep' him till his month was up. But I pit him on to white-washin' an' ither rough wark, whaur he couldna mak' ony vera serious blunders."

"White-washin' mak's me seeck," said Willie.

"Weel, ye'll jist ha'e to acquire a taste for it, ma laddie. It's pairt o' yer tred. A time'll come when ye'll be gled to get a white-washin' job. Ye needna expec' to be aye employed on fine wark. When ye're a wean, ye think ye'll no' need to eat yer crusts when ye grow up; but when ye're an auld man, ye soak them in yer tea afore ye'll waste them. Na, na! It's no' a' ivory enamel an' gold leaf in the pentin' tred."

Mr. Redhorn might have risen to higher

Digitized by Google

flights, but Willie interrupted him with the question—

"Did the chap ye was speakin' aboot like white-washin'?"

"Och, he liket everything at that time. It made nae odds to him what his job was. I daursay he wud ha'e been jist as pleased if he had been a sclater soopin' a vent, or a plumber inside a drain-pipe. He sang like a lintie frae mornin' till nicht aboot a lass o' the name o' Annie Rooney—that wasna the richt name, of course. An' he had a smile for everybody—even for Mistress M'Innes, when he pit his brush through her winda. Some folks said they were fair seeck o' his sang aboot Miss Rooney, but he never heedit them. It didna affec' me yin wey or anither, for I'm nae songster; but I wud faur rather see a lad cheery nor glum, so I didna discourage him. 'Deed, he was the cheeriest penter I ever seen—an' the warst. But, of course, he wasna responsible for his actions, as they say at the wife-beatin' trials."

The painter looked at his watch.

"Awa' oot an' see if the boat's comin', Wullie," he said briskly.

The boy obeyed, and returned within two minutes.

"It's no comin' yet, Maister Ridhorn. A—is the penter that's comin' wi' the boat a young chap?" he inquired.

"Na, na. I doot he'll be a disapp'intment to

Digitized by Google

the junior female population o' Fairport, but I wasna inclined to risk anither sentimental yin. I daursay John Kelly—that's his name—wud be surprised at the questions in ma letter; but his answer said that he was forty-five, mairrit, fower children, teetotal, an' nae songster; an' it said, forbye, that he was takin' the job for his health's sake. So I think he'll be safe enough."

"Could we no' ha'e managed wi'oot a man?" asked Willie, who secretly resented the coming of the stranger.

His master shook his head. "I've promised to ha'e certain jobs feenished at certain times, an' I couldna keep ma promises wi'oot assistance. I'm no' wantin' ma customers to be turnin' on me an' sayin'—'It's easier gettin' ye into the hoose nor oot!' I want to keep to ma bargain—or as near it as possible. The public's aye complainin' aboot tredsmen never feenishin' jobs accordin' to arrangement, an' I'm boun' to admit the public ha'e whiles reason for complainin'. But I defy onybody to prove that penters are the warst offenders. In ma unbased opeenion [Mr. Redhorn probably meant to say 'unbiassed'], a penter's naething to complain aboot compared wi' a jiner. Criftens! the mere sicht o' a jiner gars me wonder hoo Noah managed to get the Ark feenished in time. An' a plumber's nae better; only ye never ken exac'ly what a plumber's daein' wi' yer pipe, an' ye daurna say a word

Digitized by Google

in case he walks aff in the huff an' leaves the water scootin' at ye."

Mr. Redhorn paused a moment, and continued—

"At the same time, the penter is faur frae being perfec'. He's by nae means free frae the vice o' procrastinism. When ye're a journeyman, Wullie, try to keep yer promises. If ye succeed, ye'll maybe dee famous an' get a monument to yer memory frae a gratefu' an' astoundit public. I've aye made the error of promisin' ower muckle. Tak' advantage, laddie, o' ma experience. If ye're offered a job that ye *think* micht be feenished in a week, look as sad as ye can, an' say ye'll dae yer best to complete the wark in a fortnicht, though the effort sud ruin yer constitution. Dinna smile shuperior-like an' tell yer customer ye'll ha'e the 'hale show feenished easy in three days, wi'oot fail. In ma young days I kent a man that was nicknamed 'Wi'oot Fail,' because he aye said the words to his customers. He was a grocer, a dacent man, an' I hope he's still got the breath to say the words wi', though I never heard tell o' him livin' up to them. But that's ma advice to you, Wullie. Ca' canny wi' yer promises, an' ye'll maybe live to stagger humanity by feenishin' a job afore ye said ye wud. . . . Rin oot an' see if ye can spy the boat."

This time Willie returned with the information that the steamer was rounding the point on the other side of the loch.

Digitized by Google

"Ye better gang roon' to Mistress Dobie, an' tell her to get her new ludger's breakfast ready," said the painter. "The man'll be cauld an' hungry efter his journey, an' forbye that, he's comin' to Fairport for his health."

When Willie came back from delivering the message, he put a question which had been exercising him for some days—ever since he had heard that the man was coming.

"Maister Ridhorn, wull I need to dae what he tells me to dae, jist the same as if he was you?"

"Certainly, Wullie," Mr. Redhorn replied promptly. "He'll be yer maister when I'm no' there. Ye'll let him see what a smairt lad ye are, an' show him onything he canna fin' oot for hissel'."

The boy did not look too pleased.

"Hoo lang is he to be wi' us?" he asked.

"I canna say for certain," returned the painter, who was busy selecting some brushes from a pot of water. "Sax weeks onyway, Wullie. He'll bide langer, maybe, if there's plenty for him to dae."

There was a short silence broken by Willie, who said in a low voice—

"Sax weeks! Maybe I'll no' be here in sax weeks.

"What did ye say, laddie?" inquired Mr. Redhorn, without looking up.

Willie hesitated. His mother had told him not to mention to anyone in the village the pos-

Digitized by Google

sibility of their removal from Fairport. But he had forgotten. Now he remembered, yet disobeyed her request.

"I said I wud maybe no' be here in sax weeks."

Mr. Redhorn stared at him. "No' here in sax weeks? Hoo that?" he demanded.

The boy grinned—somewhat foolishly. "It's a secret—I wasna to tell onybody—but we're maybe gaun awa' to Canada."

"To Canada!" gasped the painter. "Wha's gaun to Canada?"

"Ma Uncle Robert sent a letter to ma mither, an' he wants her to gang to Canada an' keep his hoose for him. An' I'm to gang tae! It'll be fine! Uncle Robert's been makin' a heap o' money for a while back. . . . But I wasna to tell."

Mr. Redhorn was silent.

"Ye'll no' let on I tell't ye?" pleaded Willie.

"Na, na," his master briefly replied. "See if the boat's near the pier yet," he added a moment later.

Left to himself, the painter put his hand to his brow and sighed heavily. Willie's information was a severe blow. To think of the boy leaving Fairport was sorrow indeed. The good trade was nothing to him now, unless a mockery.

"But it's no' fixed yet," he said to himself, endeavouring to ease the burden of doubt and despair that had come upon him.

Digitized by Google

Willie reappeared. "The boat'll be at the pier in five meenutes."

"Aweel, I best gang doon an' meet John Kelly." Mr. Redhorn did not look at his apprentice. "Ye micht clean thur brushes till I come back."

He stepped to the door.

"Wait a bit, Maister Ridhorn!" called Willie after him in a laughing voice.

Mr. Redhorn halted and turned eagerly. Perhaps, after all, Willie had only been joking about Canada.

"There some yella pent on yer broo," said Willie.

Mr. Redhorn fled.

Digitized by Google

XII

HIS REWARD

THE painter tapped gently on the cottage door — so gently, indeed, that his knuckles on the wood made scarce a sound. He waited several minutes, then tapped again, a trifle less gently. An ordinary human ear might just have detected the tapping which to Mr. Redhorn seemed like thunder. Once more he tapped, and stood listening.

Presently he heard the sound of footsteps within, and he drew a little way back from the door, his countenance ruddy.

But the footsteps halted abruptly; there was a loud clank followed by a soft thud. A moment later the sound of a slight splash reached his ears. Then came a thump; and immediately after the thump began a noise which Mr. Redhorn understood.

"She's scrubbin' her kitchen," he told himself. "I doot I've come at an unseasonable time."

He turned round, stroking his nose in a foolish, undecided fashion and blinking through his spectacles in the forenoon sunshine. "Oh, criftens!" he sighed, "what am I to dae?"

Digitized by Google

As if for inspiration he gazed down the blue firth. A big steamer with a red funnel was bellowing a farewell to her tender that piped a mournful reply.

"Allan liner!" muttered Mr. Redhorn. He started violently. His ruddy colour faded. "Allan liner boun' for Canada—*Canada*." He faced the door and again knocked more loudly than he intended. The sound of scrubbing ceased. He clenched his hands.

The door was opened. Mrs. McWattie stood before him, her print sleeves rolled above her elbows, a sackcloth apron tied round her waist. Her comely, fresh-coloured face wore an expression of surprise. Then she smiled.

"Oh, Maister Ridhorn, it's you!" she exclaimed. "This is a fine mornin'."

"Ay, it's a—a fine mornin', Mrs. McWattie. It's a fine mornin'. I doot we'll get rain afore lang, but it's a fine mornin', as ye say. Oh, ay, it's a rale fine mornin'. Ay!" Here he found himself unable to proceed. Beads appeared on his brow; his countenance suggested intense mental anguish.

The smile faded from the widow's face.

"Come ben, Maister Ridhorn," she said gravely, and led the way to the kitchen. "Mind yer feet, if ye please."

The warning was necessary, for the painter was about to put his left foot in a flat tin containing soft soap. With his right he sent the scrubbing brush halfway across the floor.

Digitized by Google

"Never heed it," said Mrs. McWattie. "Tak' a sate. Excuse the mess."

Mr. Redhorn subsided into the armchair, looking dazed. Mrs. McWattie stood, leaning against the dresser. The silence grew heavy. The widow broke it at last.

"Weel, Maister Ridhorn," she said very sadly, "I suppose it's aboot Wullie."

Mr. Redhorn cleared his throat. "Wullie," he began, and stuck.

"Oh, ye dinna need to tell me," she said. "I ken ye dinna want to hurt ma feelin's. Mony's the time I've tell't Wullie he wud try yer patience ower faur wi' his carelessness an' his pranks. An' he's done it noo."

"But——"

"Na, na. Dinna tell me. I ken fine hoo mony chances ye've gi'ed him, Maister Ridhorn; an' if he's no gratefu' to ye, his mither is. I'm rale vexed he's turned oot a disapp'intment to ye. He's no' a bad laddie, but he's careless an' fu' o' mischief, an'—maybe he needs a stricter maister nor yersel'. But, oh! I wish he——"

Mr. Redhorn found speech at last.

"Stop, stop, Mistress McWattie!" he cried. "Ye're deludin' yersel'! I've nae complaints agin Wullie. He hasna played a prank o' ony description for—for near a week! An' he hasna made a blunder since—since I dinna ken when. Wullie's gettin' on fine, an' I'm rale pleased wi' him. I assure ye I am. I wudna

Digitized by Google

deceive ye." The painter stopped like a clock run down.

Mrs. McWattie's face expressed her relief, but she was still puzzled. She left the dresser and came over to the fire.

"I'm gled, gled to hear ye say that," she said, not quite steadily. "When I think o' a' yer kindness to ma laddie, I—I——"

"Whisht, whisht, Mistress!" muttered Joseph, exquisitely uncomfortable.

"There's naebody wud ha'e treatit Wullie like what you've done," she went on. "I'm no' speakin' aboot his wages, which was faur bigger nor his wark was worth—but ye've been guid to Wullie every wey, an'—an' Wullie's a' I've got."

"An' he's a' *I've* got," blurted out the painter, and grew red with confusion. "I'm sure I dinna ken what I wud dae wantin' Wullie," he stammered. "That—that's what I cam' to see ye aboot the day, Mistress. I—I dinna want to loss Wullie."

Mrs. McWattie eyed the pail of still steaming water and said soberly—

"I suppose Wullie's been tellin' ye aboot his uncle, Maister Ridhorn."

"Ay. But I wasna to tell. I never thocht ye wud guess. Ye'll no' be angry at him. The laddie let it oot unintentional-like."

"I didna want him to tell onybody till I had decidet," she returned slowly. "But I suppose he couldna keep it frae you," she added, smiling

Digitized by Google

faintly. "Wud ye no' be better wi' anither apprentice?" she asked suddenly.

Mr. Redhorn gasped. "Ha'e ye decidet to—to gang to Canada? Aw, Mistress McWattie!"

"No' jist decidet. But I'm thinkin' it's ma duty to gang for Wullie's sake, let alane for my ain sake. Ye see, Maister Ridhorn, Wullie wud be a heap the better o' ha'ein' his uncle to luk efter him, an'——"

"An' what aboot yersel'?" asked the painter, in a husky whisper.

"Me? Oh, weel, I suppose I'm as fond o' comfort an' guid things as maist weemen. An' ma brither's unco weel aff nooadays. It's no' his fau't he didna offer to help me afore. But he's rale willin' noo, an' so I'm thinkin' serious o' Canada, though it's a lang road there. But I'll see that Wullie gi'es ye a fortnicht notice onywey. An' I'll—I'll never forget what ye've done for him."

Mr. Redhorn did not at once reply. He sat in a crouching attitude, his interlocked fingers working nervously between his knees. When he spoke, his voice was quite unfamiliar to the widow.

"I dinna want to loss Wullie," he said, the words coming spasmodically. "I've nae doot he wud dae weel in Canada. I'm no' sayin' onything agin the place. But I'm thinkin' o' masel'. I dinna want to loss him. D'ye see, Mistress? . . . I dinna want to loss him. I'm maybe no' as weel aff as his respectit uncle,

Digitized by Google

but there's naebody keener for Wullie to dae weel an' get on nor Joseph Ridhorn. That's genuine! . . . Ye was sayin' ye thocht Wullie wud be the better o' bein' lukit efter, an' I'm no' denyin' his respectit uncle could dae that. But so could Joseph Ridhorn, if—he got the chance. . . . Mistress McWattie!" he exclaimed appealingly, "d'ye no' think Wullie wud be as weel wi' a fayther-in-law as an uncle?"

"A what?"

"I meant for to say—a stepfayther," said Mr. Redhorn, collapsing after his great effort.

The widow crossed the floor to the window. She was half laughing, half crying.

The painter rose, and, clutching the back of his chair, hoarsely whispered—

"Mistress McWattie, if ye gang to Canada, Joseph Ridhorn's a done man!"

It was near the dinner hour when he left the cottage. The very sun seemed to be shining, the very sea sparkling, for joy in his joy.

He turned to wave his hand to the woman who stood in the cottage doorway, and stumbled over a loose stone, so that his cap fell off. Playfully he kicked it five yards in front of him, and when he had picked it up, set it on his head at an angle of jauntiness which caused several neighbours to look at him twice. As he neared the village he saw ap-

Digitized by Google

proaching his old enemy, Mr. Danks, the fish-merchant.

Joseph held his head a little higher, but smiled in spite of himself. At one time he had feared Mr. Danks as a rival.

Mr. Danks stopped.

"Ye're lukin' unco joco' the day, Professor Ridhorn," he said, with a sour grin.

"Am I?"

"Ye've maybe no' heard the news aboot Mistress McWattie. She's for Canada!"

"Is she?" With a loud laugh Mr. Redhorn walked on, leaving the fishmonger gaping after him.

"Fine day, Joseph," remarked an old woman.

"Finest I ever seen," returned the painter.

But at the sight of his abode his excitement abated and gave place to misgivings. Willie would be awaiting his arrival, as arranged, and Mr. Redhorn had undertaken to break the news to the boy. Ten minutes ago it had seemed a simple task; now it seemed most delicate and difficult.

Joseph stepped into Mrs. Fergus's small shop and purchased a bottle of lemonade.

"This is a gran' day," said the little woman.

"Ay," returned Joseph slowly, "it's been a fine day up till the noo."

At the door of his home he found Willie.

"Gang ben, laddie," he said, opening the door. "Here a bottle of leemonade for ye to

Digitized by Google

tak' afore ye rin hame. Sit doon, sit doon. Is Kelly awa' to his dinner?"

"Uh-ha. Am I to drink it oot the bottle, Maister Ridhorn?"

"Tits!" The painter got a tumbler from the cupboard. "There ye are."

"Thenk ye. Mistress Young was here a while back speirin' what wey ye hadna been at her paurlour this mornin'. Whar was ye?"

"Whaur was I?" Mr. Redhorn dropped into his easy-chair. "Aw, I was alang at——" He stopped short. Then: "Wullie, was ye speakin' to onybody aboot Canada?"

Willie moved uneasily on his chair. "I forgot. I didna mean to tell onybody but you."

"Aweel, it canna be helpit. Tell me, is—is yer hert set on gaun to Canada?"

"I wud like fine to gang," said Willie, and took a pull at his lemonade.

Mr. Redhorn sighed. "But no' wi'oot yer mither?"

"Aw, no' wi'oot her. . . . I wudna get gaun ma lane."

"Ye micht get gaun yer lane, if ye was aulder, an' if ye was a journeyman, an' if the chances was better there nor here. I wudna staun' in yer road, laddie, I wudna—I mean to say, yer mither wudna staun' in yer road, though she wud miss ye sair. But i' the meantime, Wullie, i' the meantime——" Mr. Redhorn could get no further just then.

Digitized by Google

"This leemonade's awfu' guid," remarked the apprentice.

Mr. Redhorn placed his hand on his brow, shading his eyes. After an interval of silence he spoke in the voice that had been unfamiliar to the boy's mother.

"Wullie, ye've got an esteemed uncle in Canada, an' I daursay he could dae a heap for ye. But he couldna be mair anxious for yer prosperity nor—nor the man that's speakin' to ye the noo. . . . I dinna want to loss ye, Wullie. I dinna want to loss ye. What I mean to say is that Fairport's maybe no' as big as Canada, but there'll aye be room for yersel' as a penter in the former. D'ye see what I mean? . . . Weel, noo, Wullie, did ye ever think hoo ye wud like to ha'e a—a stepfayther?"

There was a dead silence in the room. Mr. Redhorn tried to face his apprentice, but he could not manage it.

"Wullie!" he said. "Supposin'——"

"D'ye mean yersel'?" the boy suddenly inquired.

"Jist that," said his master. "I seen yer mither this mornin'. She—she—was willin'."

Something manly came into the boy's face. He laid the half-emptied tumbler on the table, and rose from his seat. He took a step towards Mr. Redhorn.

"I'm gled it's you," he said gravely.

Mr. Redhorn leapt up, his face beaming.

Digitized by Google

"Here's ma haun', Wullie!" he cried, "an' may the Lord help me to deal justly wi' you an' yer mither."

They shook hands.

"I'm *awfu'* gled!" said Willie warmly, and the next instant became painfuly embarrassed.

But ere long he recovered, as did his prospective stepfather.

"I suppose," said Mr. Redhorn thoughtfully, when the boy was about to go to his home, "I suppose this has been a maist stupendous surprise to ye, Wullie."

"Aw, weel," returned Willie quietly, "it wasna exac'ly a surprise."

Then he laughed, and so did Mr. Redhorn, though he couldn't have explained why he did so.

Joseph Redhorn paced the room that had been his solitary home for so long. He had already decided on a new home—a cottage with three rooms and kitchen, and a bit of garden.

"It'll be the brawest cottage in Fairport, frae a penter's p'int o' view," he told himself. "For yin thing, I'll dae the lobby dado wi' conventional comets! By Jupiter, an' so I will!"

In an ecstasy of satisfaction with everything in creation, he smote his chest.

"Criftens! I'm that happy, I wish I was a songster!"

Digitized by Google

What the Press Says of

OH! CHRISTINA!

By J. J. BELL

Illustrated, Cloth, net 60 cts.

Newark Call

"One lays down the book with a sigh of pleasure and a wish that it were longer—much longer—and that some day Mr. Bell will let us know what really becomes of Christina and if she ever grows up out of her altogether delightful childhood."

Denver Republican

"The cleverness of the little rough diamond, the goodness of her heart in spite of her manners, which shock the prim old maiden aunt, the efforts of Christina to protect the interests of that aunt and, over all, to entangle her in a real romance, make a cheering bit of reading through the all too few pages of the book. The characters in the story stand out like human beings and one has the feeling of having made some new acquaintances when the end of the accounting of their doings is reached."

Boston Transcript

"'Oh! Christina!' is a 'Wee Macgreegor' in petticoats. There is in it more than transitory fun. It is full of human nature as it exists not merely in Scotland, but everywhere."

Denver Post

"Wee MacGreegor's Cousin comes and the life tdat little Scotch lassie leads her prim maiden auntie is enough to keep one laughing from start to finish, and you scarcely know which of the two you like the better."

Rochester Post Express

"The naturalness, naivete, and inimitable humor of the narrative will win for it a wide popularity."

Digitized by Google

"A modern up-to-date bit of fiction."—*Book News*

THIRD EDITION READY

Whither Thou Goest

By J. J. BELL

12mo, Cloth, net $1.20

The Outlook

"In 'Whither Thou Goest,' Mr. Bell is more ambitious than in 'Wee Macgreegor,' and in many ways shows a deeper knowledge of life and its intricacies. The story is not on ordinary lines; it is most skillfully constructed and includes a variety of characters which make it bright and unfailingly entertaining."

Boston Times

"We all remember Mr. Bell as the author of 'Wee Macgreegor,' but, good as it is, this new story is his best work—thus far. In it he strikes a new vein, perfectly irresistible to any one who loves a straightforward, honest tale, full of living, breathing characters whom one seems to have met and known."

Rochester Advertiser

"Mr. Bell's latest more than realizes all expectations. As a bit of writing, it is exceptionally well-done; as a story, it occupies a unique place. The story is well told, the action is rapid and leads to a natural climax. Mr. Bell has a finely developed sense of humor, a healthy outlook on

Minneapolis Tribune

"Mr. Bell is a novelist of the Dickensian type, and in this new story he makes use of his rare gifts of sincerity and simplicity. He sees below the surface of things and treats with genial humor and kindly philosophy the affairs of everyday life. Mr. Bell's new book will not fail to add to his reputation for the crisp dialogue and the quaint touch of Scotch character and humor which make his other works so popular."

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

"Mistress McWattie, if ye gang to
Ridhorn's a done man!"

Digitized by Google